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Facilitatory and Inhibitory Factors in Higher Education Mergers Case Studies from the Irish Institute of Technology Sector

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**Facilitatory and Inhibitory Factors in Higher Education Mergers:
Case Studies from the Irish Institute of Technology Sector**

Allison Kenneally

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration in
Higher Education Management**

**University of Bath
Department of Management
April 2017**

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ABSTRACT

The Irish Institute of Technology (hereinafter referred to as IoT) sector is poised to undergo a period of transformation, consolidation and system reconfiguration, to be brought about through a series of institutional mergers, collaborations and alliances. This research focuses on the Irish higher education (hereinafter referred to as HE) landscape, and in particular, on the journey of three groups of IoTs (hereinafter referred to as Alliances) as they plan to merge and subsequently apply to be re-designated as technological universities (hereinafter referred to as TUs). This research provides a contemporaneous account of how the Irish IoTs are organising themselves for merger and examines the substantial challenges which lie therein. By examining and comparing three Alliances which are undergoing a similar process but with varying degrees of success, this research explores the key factors which facilitate on one hand, and/or inhibit on the other, merger negotiations and the merger process in HE, both at a system and institutional level. This knowledge will be useful to policy makers and other higher education institutions (hereinafter referred to as HEIs), particularly in Ireland's IoT sector, which is likely to experience a wave of mergers over the coming decade. It also contributes to the relatively scant body of literature on the nature of and the factors impacting upon the merger process in higher education, and of mergers in the Irish HE context.

A qualitative study, employing a multiple case study approach, was adopted, which investigated the facilitatory, inhibitory and critical success factors across three Alliances of Irish IoTs who are proposing to merge, through document analysis, interview and the use of audio and visual materials, collected from March 2015 to August 2016. Based upon a thematic analysis of data gathered from the three cases, this research identifies and categorises the key factors that are perceived to facilitate on the one hand, or inhibit on the other, the merger process in HE, both at a system and institutional level. A framework consisting of political, strategic, operational, emotive, historic and cultural factors is proposed, examined and discussed, and recommendations for both institutional and system level actors are provided. In addition, this research proposes a micro-political model which details the various phases through which HE mergers proceed, and argues that it is the macro and micro-political and emotive factors, rather than strategic or operational factors, which have the most powerful influence on the merger process.

SUMMARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|--|
| DBA | Doctorate of Business Administration |
| DoES | Department of Education & Science |
| FE | Further Education |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| IoT | Institute of Technology |
| IR | Industrial Relations |
| HEA | Higher Education Authority |
| HEFCE | Higher Education Funding Council for England |
| MOU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| NFQ | National Framework of Qualifications |
| STEM | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics |
| TU | Technological University |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and Aims

My research aims to make an important contribution to both Irish and international HE literature, policy and practice by informing academics, HE institutions and policy makers about the experiences of Irish IoTs as they negotiate, agree and prepare to merge to form TUs. My interest in this topic arises from my management role in one of the IoTs which is currently undertaking a rather difficult and challenging merger process. I am interested in examining this purported merger, along with other similar cases, to determine both what factors are at play are during the merger process, and to investigate which of these facilitate or inhibit the progress of HEIs as they journey towards merger. A knowledge and understanding of both the dynamics and stages of the pre-merger and merger process is critical for all HEIs who are proposing to merge. Therefore this study is focused on the process, rather than the outcomes, of merger. This study examines the journey through the merger process of three Alliances of IoTs during the period from late 2010 through to August 2016.

The central aim of my study is to identify the facilitatory and inhibitory factors that have impacted upon the progress of three Alliances of IoTs as they prepare to merge, in an attempt to increase understanding of the pre-merger and merger process in HE. This knowledge will be of particular use to policy makers and other HEIs, particularly in Ireland's IoT sector, which is likely to experience a wave of mergers in the coming decade. There are some clear gaps in our theoretical knowledge regarding the merger process itself and much of the research to date has focused on what factors led to the successful implementation of an agreement to merge. The literature has not focused to significant extent on what happens during the actual merger process itself, during which crucial decisions about partner choice, vision and mission, due diligence arrangements and engagement with both internal and external stakeholders take place. This phase, which sets the foundations for the actual merger, is largely neglected in the HE literature. My study aims to make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge available regarding this critical stage of proceedings

The substantive aim of my study is to identify the factors which facilitate on the one hand, and inhibit on the other, the merger process in HE in Ireland, both at a system and

institutional level. The theoretical aim is to construct and adopt a framework based on the key facilitatory and inhibitory factors drawn from higher education and management literature, and to use this framework to see how far those factors apply to the Irish HE context in particular.

In terms of its methodological approach, my study will adopt a qualitative approach, using case studies to gather data on the perceptions of management in IoTs preparing to merge, through interview, document analysis and the use of audio and visual materials. This Chapter sets out my research questions, the context within which my research takes place, and an outline of the remainder of the thesis.

1.2 Research Questions

The central research question of my study is: **What are the key factors which facilitate on one hand, or inhibit on the other, the merger process in the Irish IoT sector?**

In order to answer this question, I have developed a number of sub questions as follows:

1. What do management in Irish IoTs perceive to be the main facilitators of the merger process?
2. What do management in Irish IoTs perceive to be the main inhibitors of the merger processes?
3. Do any of these factors differ from those identified in the literature as being facilitatory or inhibitory factors for HE mergers, and if so, what were the particular features of the Irish context that led to these differences?
4. What are the micro-political/policy phases through which the proposed mergers may proceed?
5. What critical success factors for HE mergers can be identified from these cases?

In order to answer these questions, I will develop a conceptual framework based on the key facilitatory, inhibitory and critical success factors identified from the literature as impacting upon mergers in HE and I will then examine the applicability of this framework to the journey of the Irish IoTs.

1.3 Overview of Thesis

My thesis is structured into seven chapters. Chapter 1 – Introduction - has outlined my research aims and questions. Chapter 2 – Background and Context - will present in some detail the context, impetus and process for mergers in the Irish HE landscape.

Chapter 3 – Literature Review - will focus on theories derived from the literature which are relevant to my research questions. I will conduct a critical examination of the nature of mergers in HE and alternatives to merger; the key drivers for mergers in HE, which I will classify as system or institutional level drivers; merger typologies or variables and their impact upon the merger process; and facilitatory and inhibitory factors to the merger process, which I will classify into system level and institutional level factors. Key issues will be identified and discussed. The literature review will form a conceptual framework to frame and guide my research questions and methodology, and will identify the contribution I expect my research to make to the overall body of knowledge in this area.

Chapter 4 – Research Design: Methods & Methodology - will present my individual approach to research design, which is based on an interpretivist, constructivist approach, executed through a qualitative, multiple-case study involving three Alliances preparing to merge in Ireland, and employing a variety of methods of data collection. It will present an account of the steps taken at each stage of the study, with a critical reflection on the methodological choices made.

Chapters 5 & 6 present my findings, along with an analysis and discussion of same. Chapter 5 contains a within-case analysis of each Alliance. This will focus on the unique context of each case and will identify and discuss the key factors which management perceive to have facilitated and/or inhibited the merger process in that particular Alliance.

Chapter 6 will present and discuss a cross-case analysis of the data to identify similarities, which would be expected at system level, and differences, which may be more prevalent at an institutional level between the cases/data. It will propose a broad classification for the facilitatory and inhibitory factors found across the cases.

These findings will inform Chapter 7 – Recommendations & Conclusion – which will present and discuss my response to the research questions posed and assert the significance of the study in terms of its contribution to academic knowledge. It will contain a self-reflection upon the limitations of my research design and findings. Finally, it will present recommendations for further research on the topic.

2. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction to the Irish HE Landscape and the IoT Sector

The Irish HE landscape is almost exclusively public in nature and is characterised by a binary divide, with traditional universities and IoTs operating in parallel, if not in harmony, with each other. The IoTs were originally established as Regional Technical Colleges in the 1970's and were placed on an independent statutory footing by the *Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992*. Section 5 of that Act provides that the primary function of Regional Technical Colleges is to provide higher education for the economic, technological, scientific, commercial, industrial, social and cultural development of the State, with particular reference to the region served by the college (Ireland, Regional Technical Colleges Act, 1992).

In the late 1990's, all of the Regional Technical Colleges were upgraded to IoTs. At present, there are 14 IoTs in Ireland, dispersed on a regional basis across the State. IoTs generally offer academic programmes of study at sub-degree, degree and post graduate levels across a wide range of disciplines, focusing on applied, work based and professionally orientated education to serve the region in which they are situated. Some also engage in university level research, knowledge exchange and transfer, although generally not to the same extent as the traditional universities.

In recent years, IoTs have come under considerable pressure from the government to reform. *The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DoES, 2011), which espoused long term, high level strategic objectives for the entire Irish HE sector, set an agenda for transformation in the sector which has continued to gain impetus.

2.2 The Emergence of a 'Third Sector'- Technological Universities

The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* called for the development of a "coherent set of higher education institutions, each of significant strength, scale and capacity" (DoES, 2011, p.14). It attempted to refocus the efforts of HEIs by engaging them in planned mission shift, rather than mission drift, and in this manner, reconfigure the Irish HE landscape to ensure a coordinated system of responsive institutions with diverse profiles and missions. It demanded enhanced collaboration and institutional consolidation,

particularly in the IoT sector (DoES, 2011, p.15) and envisaged that “based upon demonstrated strong performance against mission-relevant criteria...some (IoTs) could apply for re-designation as technological universities” (DoES, 2011, p.15).

The National Strategy clearly stated that the creation of TUs was aimed at “promoting institutional mergers and ensuring advanced institutional performance” (DoES, 2011, p.103). It is interesting to note that there was not unanimity in the expert group which produced the National Strategy on the creation of TUs. The counter view expressed by some members was that the creation of TUs would not solve the issue of mission drift and would result in a third tier of institutions (DoES, 2011, p.103). Nonetheless, subsequent reports and publications have indicated a clear intention from policy makers to pursue the creation of TUs.

While some HEIs have welcomed the proposed creation of TUs (mainly those in the IoT sector itself), others have been less embracing. The opportunity to apply for re-designation as a university is naturally an attractive proposition for IoTs, who suffer from a variety of ‘second sector’ difficulties. IoTs are not only less well funded than traditional universities, but also carry the burden of being more heavily regulated and having significantly less autonomy and flexibility than the universities. The IoT label is not one which is readily understood internationally, which can make it more difficult for the Irish IoT sector to attract international students. It can also limit the potential positive dynamic effect which a HEI can have on a region in terms of attracting foreign direct investment and industry to the region.

2.3 The Nature and Role of a Technological University

Since the publication of the *National Strategy* in 2011, much debate has centred on what exactly a TU is or should be and confusion and ambiguity is evident (Von Prondzyski, 2011, 2015). The ‘traditional’ university sector has been particularly scathing of the notion of a TU and argues that TUs are nothing more than IoTs by another name and will weaken and undermine the existing Irish university brand (Flynn, 2012). Some opine that TUs should be focused on, and indeed limited to activity in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields; others that they will be no different from existing universities and are just a political tool, which will populate an already over-crowded, under-funded and under-performing university marketplace (Flynn 2012). There is a significant degree of tension between the various positions expressed above,

particularly in relation to the academic fields in which the new TUs should engage. IoTs, which have been accused of ‘mission drift’ by the traditional universities, now provide programmes of study across a wide range of discipline areas, including business, law, humanities and the arts. This area of study represents a large portion of the registration figures in most IoTs and is something which they will be extremely hesitant to sacrifice in order to create a TU which would be limited to activity in the STEM fields. Indeed, it would make no sense for them to do so, given both regional need, student demand and funding arrangements in the sector at present. It should also be noted that the traditional universities are themselves guilty of so-called mission drift, offering applied/vocational programmes of study, focusing on work based learning and engagement activities and offering programmes of study which traditionally were provided by the IoT sector.

Internationally, Davies (2014, p.3) notes that TUs have conventionally been regarded as having a primary focus on the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, often as a consequence of their historical antecedents as polytechnics, technical institutes, fachhochschule, etc. Davies (2014, p.3) states that TUs have also accumulated related areas of professional training and that many now have a much broader spread of disciplines, though generally connected to the STEM focus. This clearly indicates that, as the name suggests, international TUs have perhaps a greater, although not exclusive, focus on technology/STEM subjects than may be the case in most traditional universities. It is also interesting that Davies (2014, p.3) links this characteristic to the historic developmental trajectory of TUs, many of which it seems have undergone a transformation from operating as polytechnics, technical institutes, fachhochschule, etc., to re-designation as TUs, often as part of national higher education system reconfiguration efforts. This is certainly reflects the Irish context as discussed above.

Davies (2014, p.3) proposes a tripartite classification of positioning possibilities or models of TUs. Firstly, he suggests, there are TUs of

acknowledged international excellence as research intensive/graduate universities with strong commercialised Research and Development (R&D), highly elitist Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and which invariably score highly as leaders in global rankings. They tend to invent and incubate future fields of study, usually of an interdisciplinary nature (Davies, 2014, p.3).

Davies (2014, p.3) suggests Caltech, ETH Zurich, EPF Lausanne, MIT, Delft, Imperial, Tokyo IT, Hong Kong UST and Strathclyde as examples of TUs which would fall into this category. Secondly, Davies (2014, p.3) suggests, there are TUs with a “strong focus on professional education but with a formidable applied research, R&D and

Knowledge Exchange (KE) base.” Davies (2014, p.3) offers Cranfield, RMIT, Queensland UT, Coventry, Hertfordshire, Heriot Watt and Eindhoven as examples which fall into this category. Finally, Davies (2014, p.3) suggests, there are TUs with

a primary focus on education and CPD for business, industry and the professions with a predominantly regional and national role e.g. Ørebro and Oulu. They are certainly research supported and informed, and with appreciable applied R&D and consultancy”.

This final category is most closely related to the starting position of most Irish IoTs who are proposing to merge to form TUs. It is also the category which most closely aligns with the vision for TUs expressed by Irish policy makers, if perhaps not the potential TU partners themselves, some of who are slightly more ambitious in their aspirations.

In addition to the classification offered above, Davies (2014, pp.4-5) provides some further perceptions on generic characteristics of TUs. He identifies that they typically focus on STEM subjects, although not exclusively so, with non-technological subjects having a significant role to play. Most operate with overarching, multi-disciplinary academic fields, without traditional disciplinary boundaries, which are often made explicit in mature TUs. Davies (2014, p.5) argues that TUs should have an entrepreneurial culture, reflecting an ethos of partnership and accountability and that they should also be places of critical and useful learning. Furthermore, TUs should proactively engage at a strategic level with stakeholders, regional, national and international, so-called ‘glocalisation’ (Davies, 2014, p.5). They should be sustainable across all areas of activity and have a clear and explicit mission, vision and growth trajectory (Davies, 2014, p.5). Davies (2014, p.5) also highlights the importance of engaging in innovation and knowledge exchange activities with industry and the community and the importance of TUs positioning themselves as academically rigorous, yet industry oriented institutions.

In the Irish context, the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DoES 2011, p.103) states that internationally, a TU is “a higher education institution that operates at the highest academic level in an environment that is specifically focused on technology and its application.” The National Strategy provides that TUs are expected to have a distinct mission and character to preserve diversity in the Irish higher education system (DoES, 2011, p.103). It states that TUs will be distinguished from existing universities by a mission and ethos that is “based on career-focused higher education with an emphasis on provision at levels six to eight (undergraduate certificates, diplomas and bachelors degrees) and on industry-focused research and innovation (DoES, 2011, p.105).”

This appears to indicate that while the mission and ethos of TUs and IoTs will be broadly similar, a distinction will be found in the level of industry focused research and innovation expected of TUs, which will be a defining characteristic. It also indicates that TUs will operate primarily at levels six to eight on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), and states that while TUs will have “involvement at levels nine and ten (masters and doctoral degrees) appropriate to their mission...the major proportion of activity at these levels will be concentrated within the existing university sector” (DoES, 2011, p.105). In relation to the academic focus of TUs, the National Strategy provides that

the fields of learning will be closely related to labour market skill needs with a particular focus on programmes at levels six to eight in science, engineering and technology and including an emphasis on workplace learning...it will play a key role in facilitating access and progression (particularly from the workforce) by developing structured relationships with providers of further education and training (DoES, 2011, p.105).

This, read in light of the explicit criteria for designation which are discussed below, give an indication of the nature and function of TUs envisaged in the Irish context.

2.4 The ‘Merger Prerequisite’

In 2012 the HEA published *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape*. This strategy document provided further details on the the process and criteria which IoTs must undertake to apply for re-designation as a TU. Controversially, this included a requirement to merge with at least one other IoT before TU status could be conferred upon an existing IoT.

The aim of government policy in this respect was twofold. Firstly, they had in mind a ‘mopping-up’ exercise, to reduce the overall number of IoTs and reduce fragmentation in the sector, creating critical mass and scale. This, it was envisaged, would also lead to increased efficiencies and economies of scale, particularly through the rationalisation of programme offerings which tend to be replicated across the sector (HEA, 2012). It is not surprising that this was a priority for policymakers, given that the merger requirement came at a time of unprecedented economic crisis in the State and amid a wider rationalisation and cost cutting agenda from government. Secondly, policy makers envisaged the creation of a third ‘TU’ sector in the Ireland, as discussed above. To achieve these dual aims, the National Strategy linked the creation of new TUs to consolidation of the existing IoT sector, and government policy since has continued along these lines,

emphasising that only IoTs who merge will be permitted to make applications for TU designation (HEA, 2012).

The requirement to merge as a pre-requisite for TU designation has been criticised by some of the IoTs who feel that they have been on the path to university designation for some time and who argue that the requirement to merge may actually weaken their vis-à-vis the established TU criteria, particularly in relation to research and staff qualifications. A full merger requirement prior to designation is not reflective of the position in many other countries which have allowed similar system reconfiguration and re-designations to take place using looser federation models as a transition state, rather than requiring a full merger. The merger pre-requisite also has caused significant political difficulties and dilemmas for the government, particularly in one case where the merger requirement has come under considerable fire. Over time, implementation of the National Strategy will likely result in the creation of a third sector of TUs in Ireland, and in the longer term possibly lead to the death of the existing IoT sector as most if not all of the existing IoTs make the transition to become TUs.

In recent months, the merger requirement has come under renewed attack, with many in the IoT sector and the various HE Trade Unions putting political pressure under those in power to remove it entirely from the legislation. While at present the requirement to merge remains a *sine quo non* for TU designation, no legislation has been enacted. Until so enacted, it is possible that the requirements in this regard could change.

2.5 Process for Designation as a TU

A four stage process for designation was established in *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* (HEA, 2012), and has been supplemented by the establishment of key criteria which must be met before an institution can be designated as TU. These criteria play a critical role in the merger process and are likely to have a significant impact upon that process. The established four stage process for designation appears to be overly complex and lengthy, and may in fact serve to frustrate the parties to an Alliance, leading to a negative outcome.

The first stage is a formal expression of interest from two or more IoTs to the HEA, which will consider the application in the context of a system wide analysis of Ireland's HE needs and the strategic implications arising from the establishment of a new university.

If the expression of interest is met with approval from the HEA, then the Alliance of IoTs can move onto stage two of the process, which involves the preparation of a business plan to meet the criteria. This plan must address how the Alliance proposes to meet the established criteria, setting out the process requirements and timelines in a detailed fashion. As the establishment of a TU requires a merger of two or more IoTs, the stage two business plan must be based on a legally binding memorandum of understanding (hereinafter referred to as an MOU) between the IoTs, which has been approved by the Governing Body of each, describing their consolidation into a new single institution.

Once the MOU has been agreed, and the business plan submitted, the Alliance moves on to stage three of the process, which involves an evaluation of the plan by an international expert panel, appointed by the HEA. This panel must consider the capacity of the partners to achieve the objectives of the merger and the existing position of the partners in relation to each of the TU criteria. The expert panel will also consider the capacity of the partners, based on their developmental trajectory, to meet those criteria within a reasonable timeframe. If the expert panel agrees that the plan presented represents a credible and realisable proposal, the panel may offer advice to the Alliance or the HEA relating to the implementation of the plan and the partners will proceed to stage four. If the expert panel does not agree that the plan is credible and realisable, then the application will not proceed any further and the Alliance will not be permitted to make another such application for a period of five years. This appears to be a draconian and arbitrary time bar which may be placed on an Alliance who has likely acted in good faith, and in line with national policy, to effect institutional change, and no rationale for its imposition has been offered.

The fourth and final stage is the application for designation as a TU. This can only be made when a legal consolidation or merger has been achieved and the Alliance considers that all the criteria for designation have been met. In essence, this means that a final and irrevocable decision to merge must be made by the IoTs before a final decision is made on re-designation as a TU. Again this is another controversial provision, which in essence means that an Alliance may find itself in the position of having undergone a merger/consolidation, but possibly not achieving TU designation, which was the main driver behind the merger.

This final application for designation is again reviewed by an expert panel, which will have regard to the criteria for designation, along with the legal and administrative requirements applying to universities in Ireland, the configuration of institutions within the

Irish HE system, the characteristics of TUs internationally, detailed statistical profile data and the overall merits of the application. The expert panel then makes a recommendation to the HEA which will consider the report and advise the Minister for Education and Skills on how to proceed.

It is evident that the HEA act as ‘gatekeepers’ throughout the process, whose role is to consider the reports from the Alliances and the international ‘expert panels’ and to advise the Minister for Education and Skills on how to proceed. The international expert panels will be appointed by the HEA and will report to it twice during the process on the merits of the application, with the ultimate decision being left in political hands. How this process will operate in practice, and whether it will serve to further the HE reform agenda, or hinder it, will be investigated further during my research. Figure 1 below illustrates the four key stages in the process.

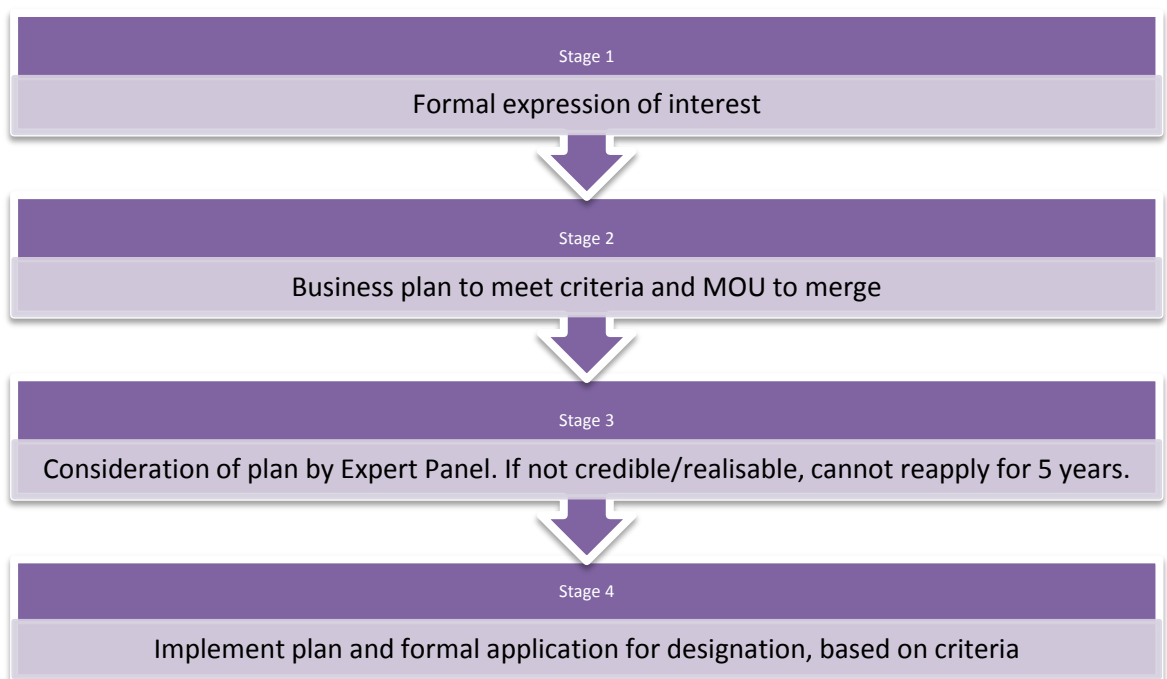


Figure 1: Key Stages in Process for Designation as a TU according to HEA (2012)

2.6 Criteria for Designation as a TU

In addition the requirement for merger, the *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* (2012) and subsequent Technological Universities Bill (DoES, 2014) established key criteria which must be met by merged IoTs at stage four before they can be

designated as TU. Appendix A of *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* (2102) established detailed criteria around mission, institutional, student and staff profiles, teaching learning and curriculum development, research, international profile and leadership, management and governance. Under this framework, TUs will be characterised by breadth of programme provision across levels six to ten of the NFQ and will have programmes which are vocationally/professionally orientated, with a strong focus on science and technology. A TU is required to have research-informed, practice-led curricula and to employ teaching, learning and assessment processes which support its core mission to develop graduates who have a focus on the world of work, engagement, employability and citizenship. In terms of research, the criteria stipulate that the focus must be on applied, problem orientated research. Additional criteria relating to the international profile and leadership, management and governance structures are also specified.

The publication of the *General Scheme – Technological Universities Bill* (DoES, 2014) provided further detail on the proposed characteristics for the design of a TU in the Irish context. Head 50 of that Bill highlights the role of TUs in providing and promoting, *inter alia*, enterprise focused course of study, opportunities for work based learning, enterprise focused research, development and innovation (RD&I), accessible and flexible learning pathways and facilities for technological and professional university education. It calls upon TUs to support the development of a skilled workforce, to support entrepreneurship, enterprise development and to serve their communities and the public interest by fostering close and effective relationships with local, regional, national and international stakeholders.

Unfortunately, the criteria for re-designation published in the Heads of Bill in 2014 differ in a number of respects from those published in *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* 2012, leading to some confusion. For example, the landscape document requires that enrolments in the applicant institution in “research programmes at Levels 9-10” will not be less than 4% of FTE enrolments at levels 8 to 10. The Heads of Bill, on the other hand, provide that there must be a minimum of 4% of full time equivalent student enrolments in honours degree programmes or above to be enrolled in “postgraduate programmes”, without specifying if these needed to be research or taught postgraduate programmes. Another difference relates to staff qualifications. The landscape document requires that at least 45% per cent of full time, higher education, academic staff, will hold a Level 10 qualification or the equivalence in professional experience, combined with a terminal degree appropriate to their profession and that the proportion of such staff that

hold an equivalence in professional experience shall not exceed 10% of full time, higher education, academic staff. The Heads of Bill provide that 45% of full time academic staff must hold a doctoral qualification or terminal degree appropriate to their profession, but does not specify a 10% limit on these staff numbers, nor does it impose the additional requirement of having equivalence in professional experience.

Additionally, the published Heads of Bill do not offer the degree of institutional autonomy which would usually be expected of a university, particularly in relation to staff contracts and financial/budgetary arrangements, which are ultimately controlled by the State. This lack of autonomy is a real impediment to the creation of truly entrepreneurial and innovative TUs.

If and when enacted, the Technological Universities Bill will enshrine the re-designation process and the merger requirement into law, with a proposed appeal mechanism provided for. However, despite being published on 22nd January 2014, the Bill has yet to be enacted, creating further delay and uncertainty for the Alliances who wish to merge and apply for re-designation. Until so enacted, it remains possible that the process or criteria which the Alliances will be subject to may change at any stage, including the requirement to merge before making a TU application. It is worth noting that the draft Heads of Bill delegate the relevant government minister legislative authority to ultimately establish the definitive criteria for re-designation by means of a Statutory Instrument. This means that the criteria, if not the process, may be subject to change even after the enactment of the relevant legislation, at the whim of the government of the day. This brings an unnecessary and intolerable degree of uncertainty to the process. It is also worth noting that since the Bill was published, there has been much debate around and opposition to the merger pre-requisite at a political level, particularly from opposition parties. The previous government had aimed to pass the Bill before its dissolution in February 2016. However, due to considerable opposition in parliament, and from the relevant trade unions, the Bill did not get passed before parliament was dissolved and a new minority government was subsequently formed. It remains to be seen whether the current minority government will be in a position to pass the proposed Bill in its current format, although it does seem unlikely given that all of the other major parties opposed aspects to it, particularly the merger pre-requisite. It has been suggested that an exception to the merger pre-requisite should be made for IoTs for whom merger is not feasible for geographical reasons, although further elucidation on this point has not been forthcoming. In recent months some have suggested that the merger requirement may be removed entirely,

leading to further uncertainty. However, the Bill is not one which has been identified by the current government as a priority for the coming term, raising further doubts about the likelihood of its passage through parliament in its current format.

Table 1 below provides a summary of the key criteria which must be met by the merged IoTs in order to be re-designated as a TU. These criteria are also likely to play a significant part in merger negotiations and process as the IoTs must ensure that, when merged into one entity, they will meet or will be on a trajectory to meet the relevant criteria.

Table 1: Key Criteria Proposed for the Creation TUs (Kenneally, 2014)

| Characteristics/Criteria | |
|--|---|
| History/Tradition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TUs – third type of HEI Existing binary divide between Universities and IoTs will remain TUs may only be formed by two or more existing Institutes of Technology which have <u>merged</u> |
| Culture and Values | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entrepreneurial ethos - use and exploit its expertise and resources, whether commercially or otherwise Externally orientated and engaged – meet the needs of its region, support links with enterprise, business, professions and stakeholders Sustainable and efficient, service led organisation |
| Mission and Vision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare graduates for complex professional roles in a changing technological world Advance knowledge through research and scholarship and disseminate this knowledge to meet the needs of society and enterprise Vocationally/professionally orientated higher education, with a strong focus on science, engineering and technology and labour market skill needs Breadth of programme provision across levels 6 to 10 of the NFQ, with an emphasis on provision at levels 6 to 8. Level 10 provision in small number of fields/departments only Play a key role in facilitating access and progression (particularly from the workforce) |
| Teaching & Learning Profile | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide programmes from Levels 6 to 10 on the NFQ, with emphasis on provision at levels 6 to 8 and involvement at levels 9 and 10 appropriate to their mission Vocationally/professionally orientated programmes with a specific focus on science, engineering and technology, providing opportunities for work based learning Curriculum content and research-informed, practice-led teaching, learning and assessment processes which are developed in conjunction with business, professional organisations, etc., and which develops graduates who have a focus on the world of work, engagement, employability and citizenship At least 90% of all full time staff will hold a level 9 qualification and that at least 45% of full time staff will hold a level 10 qualification or the equivalent in professional experience, rising to 65% of staff with level 10 qualifications within 10 years of designation |
| Student Profile | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide accessible and flexible learning pathways At least 30% of students enrolled must be lifelong learning students enrolled on professionally orientated programmes and industry up-skilling, including part-time, work related programmes and work-study programmes and/or mature learners |
| Research Involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on industry/enterprise-focused research and innovation Focus on applied, problem orientated research and social and technological development and innovation At least 4% of full time equivalent students at levels 8 to 10 must be enrolled in research programmes |

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research capacity to support on-going programmes, projects and doctoral training in at least three fields of knowledge as defined by ISCED fields of study at the two digit level, and demonstrate a trajectory showing that the institution can extend this to support two further fields within five years of designation. • Practice led, professional and industrial doctorate structures for level 10 provision |
| Knowledge Exchange | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support entrepreneurship, enterprise development and innovation • Exploitation of intellectual property and technology and knowledge transfer • Provide consulting/problem solving services that are particularly relevant to the region |
| International Orientation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International orientation which specifically reflects its mission • Sustainable range of international collaborations including joint projects, staff and student exchanges and collaborative programme provision |
| Regional Engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TUs required to have particular regard to the needs of the region in which it is located • Primarily have an industry/enterprise focus – make a measurable impact on local, regional economic development, businesses and enterprise and support the development of a skilled workforce • Also required to serve their communities and the public interest by fostering close and effective relationships with local, regional, national and international stakeholders (e.g. local authorities and regional assemblies) and enrich cultural and community life |

2.7 Response of the Irish IoT Sector to National Strategy

The response of the IoTs to the National Strategy and the potential ‘prize’ of re-designation as a TU has varied and is dependent mainly upon the ultimate strategic intent of the particular IoT. Out of the 14 IoTs, responses can broadly be categorized as follows.

Firstly, three regional Alliances of IoTs formed almost immediately (in 2011/2012) and began the process outlined by the HEA for designation as a TU. My research will focus primarily on the journey of these three Alliances towards merger, thereby meeting one of the key criteria for re-designation as a TU. These three Alliances are at varying stages of the four step merger and re-designation process, as outlined above. Alliance A, which consists of 3 IoTs, has successfully undergone stages one, two and three of the process and was originally due to merge in August 2015. However, the absence of legislation and other factors have led to this date pushed back on a number of occasions. Alliance B, which consists of two IoTs, has successfully undergone stage one, two and three of the process, but has not yet set a definitive date for merger. Alliance C, consisting of two IoTs, successfully completed stage one of the process but failed to submit a stage two application due to a very public falling out, with one of the partners unilaterally suspending all merger activities. That partner’s President and Chairperson of its Governing Body have since vacated their posts and a Ministerial appointed independent expert published a report on the viability of the proposal going forward. Since then, the appointment of an independent facilitator/mediator has resulted in the partners attempting to get the process back on track. More recently, a fourth Alliance has emerged and has made a stage one application, although by their own admission they see merger and re-designation as a medium to long term goal. For this reason, they are unlikely to make any significant inroads on the merger process by the time my research is conducted, and so will not form part of my study. However, my research, which focuses on the experiences of the other three Alliances, should be a rich source of data for that Alliance in the future.

Secondly, a small number of IoTs have chosen to form strategic alliances/collaborations with the existing university sector and are not pursuing re-designation as a TU. Finally, the remaining IoTs have neither formed alliances with other IoTs with a view to merger and re-designation, nor have formed strategic alliances with the university sector. Presumably, these IoTs have made a deliberate strategic decision in this regard. Perhaps they have chosen to wait and see if and how the three existing Alliances succeed in their bid for re-designation before making an application. Others

may be geographically or politically isolated and lack a suitable partner. Others may feel that they best serve their region and mission by retaining their current IoT status. However, this may prove to be a risky strategy, particularly if the existing Alliances are successful in their TU bids, as the remaining small number of IoTs will essentially end up in the third tier of HEIs in Ireland. Recently, those in this category have come under increasing pressure to either join together to form a new Alliance (which would make little sense given geographic considerations), or to join other existing Alliances with a view to merger (which would considerably slow down progress made in these Alliances to date).

Figure 2 below categorises the responses of the IoT sector to the National Strategy based on their strategic intent and Table 2 provides details of individual IoTs' responses to date.

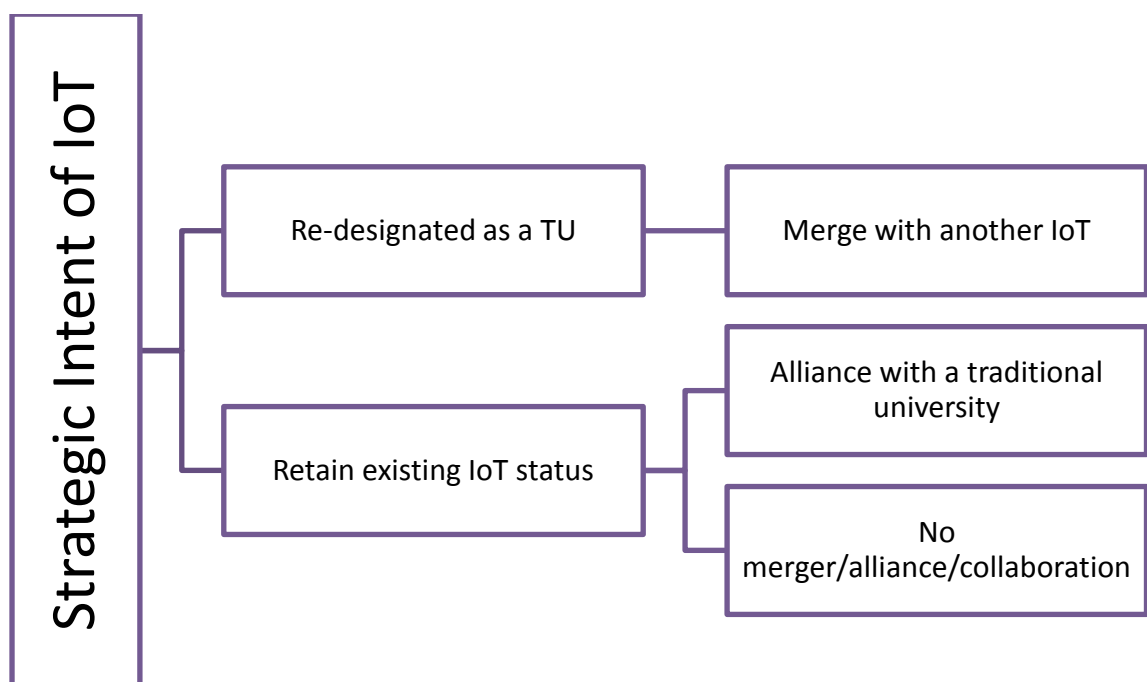


Figure 2: Responses of IoT Sector to the National Strategy to 2030

***Table 2: Strategic Response of Individual Irish IoTs to the National Strategy
for Higher Education to 2030****

| IoT | Strategic Response to National Strategy |
|--|--|
| Athlone Institute of Technology | Retain existing IoT status |
| Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown | Merge with another IoT and apply for re-designation as a TU |
| Institute of Technology, Carlow | Merge with another IoT and apply for re-designation as a TU |
| Cork Institute of Technology | Merge with another IoT and apply for re-designation as a TU |
| Dublin Institute of Technology | Merge with another IoT and apply for re-designation as a TU |
| Dundalk Institute of Technology | Strategic alliance with a traditional university |
| Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology | Strategic alliance with a traditional university |
| Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology | Merge with another IoT and apply for re-designation as a TU |
| Letterkenny Institute of Technology | Merge with another IoT and apply for re-designation as a TU |
| Limerick Institute of Technology | Retain existing IoT status |
| Institute of Technology, Sligo | Merge with another IoT and apply for re-designation as a TU |
| Institute of Technology, Tallaght | Merge with another IoT and apply for re-designation as a TU |
| Institute of Technology, Tralee | Merge with another IoT and apply for re-designation as a TU |
| Waterford Institute of Technology | Merge with another IoT and apply for re-designation as a TU |

*See Individual Institutional Submissions to the HEA & HEA Compact Agreements for further details

2.8 Government vs Institutional Objectives

From an examination of national policy and strategy above, it appears that the objective of government and policy makers is to reduce fragmentation, duplication and the number of IoTs, while also creating efficiencies and economies of scale. In contrast, and unsurprisingly, the IoTs themselves are focused on TU designation, mutual growth and financial security. This lack of alignment is problematic and is a point to which I will later return. Table 3 below compares the government/policy and institutional objectives for merger in the Irish context.

Table 3: Government vs Institutional Objectives for Mergers in the Irish Context

| Government/Policy Objectives | Institutional Objectives |
|---|--|
| Reduce fragmentation in the sector | Re-designation as a TU |
| Reduce duplication | Strengthen competitive/market position |
| Fewer, larger institutions with critical mass | Mutual growth |
| Create efficiencies and economies of scale | Financial Viability and Survival |

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

My literature review will focus on questions which are relevant to the aims of my research. My substantive aim is to identify the factors which facilitate on the one hand, and inhibit on the other, the merger process in HE in Ireland, both at a system and institutional level. The theoretical aim of my research is to construct and adopt a framework based on the key facilitatory and inhibitory factors drawn from HE and management literature, and to use this framework to see how far those factors apply to the Irish HE context in particular. This chapter aims to critically review relevant literature to identify gaps in our existing knowledge and to develop a conceptual framework around facilitatory and inhibitory factors to higher education mergers which can be applied to my study.

My core research question is **“What are the key factors which facilitate on one hand, or inhibit on the other the merger process in the Irish IoT sector?”** This core research question will be used to establish a central enquiry from which review questions for this chapter will be drawn. These questions, presented in the table below, emerge from a critical assessment of current theory and gaps in knowledge drawn from the bodies of literature identified below. These review questions will also facilitate the generation of appropriate and relevant research questions that are explicitly linked to my evaluation of the literature.

Table 4: Review Questions and Related Literature Source

| Review Questions | Literature Sources |
|---|--|
| 1. What do management in Irish IoTs perceive to be the main facilitators of the merger process? | • Mergers & Acquisitions Theory |
| 2. What do management in Irish IoTs perceive to be the main inhibitors of the merger process? | • Mergers in Higher Education |
| 3. Do any of these factors differ from those identified in the literature as being facilitatory or inhibitory factors for HE mergers, and if so, what were the particular features of the Irish context that led these differences? | • Change Management Theory • Interpersonal and Inter-organisational Trust • Organisational Culture |
| 4. What are the micro-political/policy phases | • Mergers in Higher |

| | |
|---|--|
| through which the proposed mergers must proceed? | Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Systems Model of Policy Formation in HE • HE Collaborations |
| 5. What critical success factors for HE mergers can be identified from these cases? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mergers in Higher Education • HE Collaborations |

I will therefore conduct a critical evaluation on what the existing HE merger literature suggests are the facilitatory and inhibitory factors which impact upon the merger processes, and what micro-political/policy phases proposed mergers in the sector go through. To provide context, and to further inform my research, I will also analyse key concepts regarding mergers and acquisitions generally, the typologies/characteristics of HE mergers, alternatives to merger in the HE sector, and the key drivers for merger, but with a critical eye on their impact on the merger process, rather than outcomes. From this review, I will develop and adopt a conceptual framework to frame and guide my research questions and methodology, and will identify the contribution I expect my research to make to the overall body of knowledge in this area.

3.2 Mergers and Acquisitions: Theory and Process

A wide body of strategic management literature exists on mergers and acquisitions theory and practice. This body of literature differentiates between mergers, acquisitions and takeovers, focusing to a large degree on the private sector. In this context, merger can be defined as a strategy through which two firms agree to integrate their operations on a relatively co-equal basis (Hitt et al, 2013). Often a new entity is formed subsuming the merging firms. Hitt et al (2013) argue that few true mergers actually occur, because one firm is usually seen as dominant due to market share or firm size. An acquisition, according to Hitt et al (2013), is a strategy through which one firm (acquirer) buys a controlling interest in another firm (target) with the intent of making the target a subsidiary firm within its portfolio. Finally, Hitt et al (2013) define a take-over as an acquisition strategy where the target firm does not solicit the acquiring firms bid. In practice, these terms are often used interchangeably.

Generally speaking, mergers can be seen as consisting of three distinct phases – Pre- Merger; Merger and Post Merger – each of which have different focus. Phase one, which is the pre-merger phase, focuses on merger justification, searching for and securing partners/targets, negotiation, due diligence and merger and integration planning. Phase two, is the merger itself, and is essentially a point in time when the two or more separate legal entities become one. Phase three focuses on post-merger integration, adding value, creating efficiencies and achieving the objectives of the merger begins. Figure 3 below indicates the key general stages in merger processes as identified from the broad merger literature.

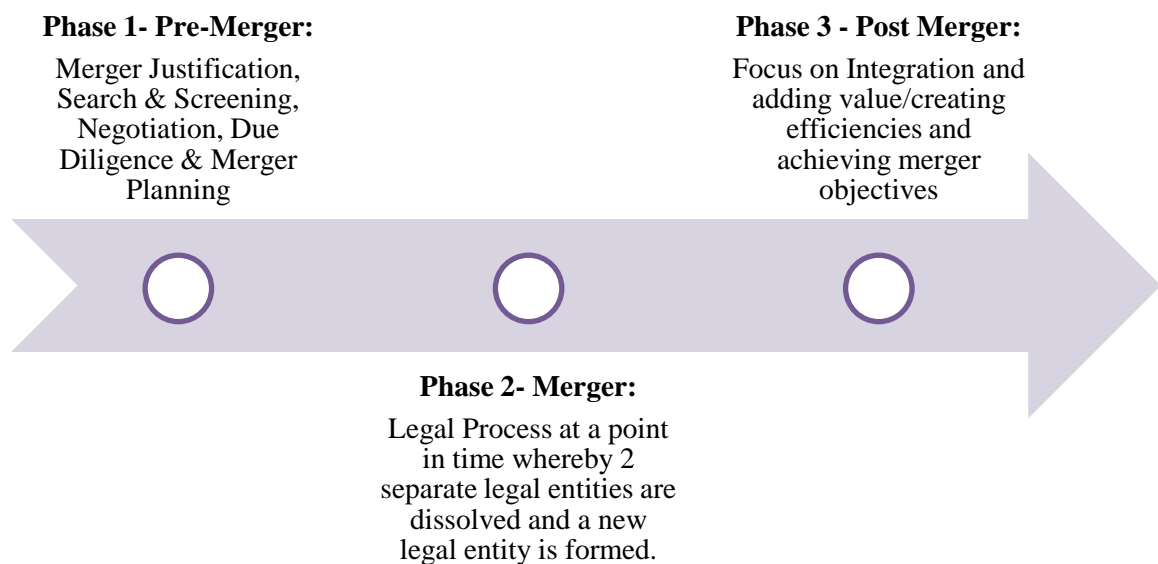


Figure 3: Key Stages in Merger Process

3.2.1 Private Sector Mergers

Private sector mergers are primarily driven by economic/market forces such as the aim to increase market share and profitability, and to create synergies and economies of scale and learning. According to Bower (2011), mergers and acquisitions are employed as a strategic response to overcapacity; to acquire research and development; to re-shape the competitive landscape; as a response to industry convergence; to facilitate product or market extension; or as part of a geographical rollup. Mergers and acquisitions are often grounded on a resource based view of the firm, and may be seen as a means of acquiring unique resources and capabilities. In the private sector, the financials, high-

technology, industrials, materials and energy and power sectors represent the greatest concentration of mergers and acquisitions globally (Desyllas, 2014).

Mergers in the private sector are often preceded with a lengthy pre-merger process, involving a number of critical stages. Initially, a 'merger justification' process will take place, which involves an assessment of the value creating potential of the target firm, the identification of a widely shared view or purpose, along with the likely sources of benefits and problems and the maximum price to pay for the target firm (Desyllas, 2014). Secondly comes the 'search and screening process', which involves the identification of potential targets, and short-listing process to identify those which satisfy the acquirer's criteria, informed by sources of information on the target including databases, personal contacts and publically available information, including company accounts, surveys, journals, credit ratings, etc. (Desyllas, 2014).

Once a target firm has been identified, the 'negotiation' process begins. At this stage, if the firms are publically listed companies, a wide variety of regulations relating to shareholder and market information and prohibitions on dealing in shares, imposed by the relevant stock exchange, may come into play. Either before or during the negotiation stage, a 'due diligence' process will be undertaken to identify and confirm or disconfirm the business reasons for the proposed merger (Burke, 2000). The aim of this due-diligence process is to provide the decision makers with key information required on the target's strengths and weaknesses and on opportunities from and potential problems of the deal. This due diligence process is particularly important from a legal perspective, in order to protect board members against potential post-merger claims from shareholders and others. The due diligence process will usually involve a series of audits on specific areas of interest to the acquirer (Harvey and Lusch, 1995). A financial audit will examine financial statements and express an opinion on the fairness with which they present the financial position of the firm, results of operations and changes in financial condition in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles. A legal and environmental audit will take place to investigate ownership of securities, intellectual property rights, legal titles, current and contingent liabilities, etc. A macro-environmental audit, production audit, R&D audit, marketing, management and information systems audits may also take place, along with a cultural and political audit to provide all of the information required to the target acquiring firm, who may then use the information to make a final decision on whether or not to merge/acquire and what price to pay. Once a decision to merge/acquire has been made, the focus then shifts to achieving the

objectives of the merger through a ‘post-merger integration’ process which will focus on value creation.

3.2.2 Public Sector Mergers

On the other hand, mergers in the public sector (which is where most HE mergers have occurred) tend to be government driven, and often occur against a backdrop of continual restructuring activities, from government departments to frontline activities (Talbot and Johnson, 2007). These are primarily driven by a desire to achieve cost efficiencies and improve service (Frumkin, 2003). O' Flynn et al (2014) argue that in the public sector, mergers are often seen in terms of collaboration or consolidation, rather than in the more aggressive acquisition mode evident in the private sector. Therefore researchers have generally aligned mergers in the public sector to other forms of joint work, such as cooperation and coordination, although they caution that this may mean that important insights may be missed into public sector merger activity. Within the public sector, merger activity in Ireland and the UK has taken place across a number of sectors, in particular health, local government, central government and education. Frumkin (2003) found that within the public sector, effective communications, swift implementation, the creation of a new culture and being prepared to make adjustments were key success factors to the merger process, and that mergers would only be viewed as successful if they satisfy or exceed the expectations of the constituents who are served by the agencies in question. O' Flynn et al (2014) found that public sector mergers should focus on adding value, and that this value could be added by espousing a clearly articulated and accepted rationale for the merger and by employing an effective change management process, which recognises the demands upon human synergy which mergers make in complex service environments. Table 5 below presents the key differences between public and private mergers, in terms of drivers, process and sectors.

Due to these differences, much of the management literature, which is focused on private sector mergers with economic drivers, acquisition and take-over focused processes, and highly specialised global sectors, is of limited use when examining public sector HE mergers, which is the context in which my research takes place.

Table 5: Key Differences between Private and Public Sector Mergers

| Differentiator | Private Sector Mergers | Public Sector Mergers |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Drivers | Primarily driven by economic/market forces such as the aim to increase market share and profitability, and to create synergies and economies of scale and learning (Desyllas, 2014) | Tend to be government driven Often occur against a backdrop of continual restructuring activities (Talbot and Johnson, 2007) |
| Process | Aggressive acquisition mode evident (O' Flynn et al, 2014) | Often seen in terms of collaboration or consolidation (O' Flynn et al, 2014) |
| Sectors | Concentrated in the financials, high-technology, industrials, materials and energy and power sectors globally | Sectors include health, local government, central government and education |

3.3 Mergers in Higher Education

A merger between two or more HEIs can of course take place within the private or public sector. However, as my research is situated within a public sector HE context, and given the difficulties associated with the application of the wider body of management literature on mergers to the public sector, it is necessary to examine the specific body of research that has developed in this specific area, and this will be used to frame and guide my research.

A decision to merge is likely to be the most difficult and far-reaching decision a HEI will ever take (Hinfelaar, 2012). Mergers of HEIs involve either the dissolution of one or more partners and assimilation into another partner (typically a take-over), or the dissolution of all partners and the creation of a new institution (typically a 'full-merger') (HEFEC, 2012). A full merger involves the dissolution of both partners (with the subsequent loss of autonomy), and the creation of a new legal entity, which is comprised of both/all partners. This new entity assumes new unitary governance and management

structures, staffing arrangements, budget, and academic mission, policies and procedures. (Davies J, 2013).

Many countries have experienced significant waves of merger activity amongst HEIs, including Australia, the United States, Norway, Finland, South Africa, the Netherlands, and Canada (Harman, 1986, 1991, 1993, 2000; Harman & Harman, 2002, 2003, 2008; Brown et al, 2004; Eastman & Lang, 2001; Goedegeburre, 1989, 1992; Hall et al, 2004; Cartwright et al, 1996). In the UK, HEFCE (2010) reported that 40 mergers took place between HEIs during the period of 1994 to 2008. Ireland, by contrast, has seen little merger activity amongst HEIs.

A merger is but one option open to HEIs and governments when attempting to restructure HE systems and institutional relationships. The literature indicates that before a decision to undertake a full merger process is made, alternative options and forms of collaboration should be fully explored (Harman and Harman, 2008; HEFEC, 2012; Davies, 2013). HEFCE (2010) reported that failure to do this has resulted in the breakdown of many HE mergers, although further details are not provided. The alternative collaborative options open to HEIs include regulation, competition, voluntary co-operation (which may be lateral or vertical), the creation of formal consortia (either national or transnational), vertical or horizontal regional partnerships, strategic alliances or joint ventures, and loose or tight federations (Davies, 2013). These options provide policy makers and institutions with a menu from which the most appropriate option to achieve a desired objective, be it system restructuring, the creation of larger HEIs or the creation of efficiencies or economies of scale, should be selected. Each of these alternative positions, ranging from a loosely controlled competition model which advocates self-interested strategic alliances, to a tightly controlled federation, warrant consideration when presented with a choice regarding system and/or institutional reconfiguration (Davies, 2013).

Indeed, even if a merger is selected as the most appropriate option, the new merged institution may choose to adopt either a unitary or federal structure. A unitary structure is one where the former participating institutions are no longer recognised as such, and a new entity is formed with a single governing body, CEO, governance structure, academic policies and procedures, etc. In federal structures, specified responsibilities usually remain with the participating institutions, with an overarching or central body taking on other agreed roles. Whilst federal models are often more attractive to participating institutions at the outset, promising some degree of sovereignty and

recognition of cultural identity, they may limit the amount of rationalisation and integration which can be achieved and may be unstable in conflict situations (Harman and Harman, 2003). In Australia, for example, from the extensive wave of mergers which took place from 1987 to 1991, only three institutions adopted federal models, and out of these three one split apart, one has since adopted a unitary structure and the third organised itself internally as a unitary organisation from the start (Harman and Robertson Cuninghame, 1995).

It is interesting at this point to note that Irish policymakers do not appear to have given any meaningful consideration to the full range of collaborative options available to them in this regard and opted for merger as the sole mechanism by which a TU, or indeed system restructuring amongst IOTs, could be achieved. This in turn meant that the Alliances of IOTs which are the subject of this research did not have any of these alternative options at their disposal. In addition, the prescriptive legislation being proposed by the Irish government also means that, once merged, a unitary structure will essentially be the only legal option open to the new institution. The impact of this on the merger process is an issue to which I will later return.

3.4 Drivers for Merger in Higher Education

A body of HE management literature has documented the use of mergers by national governments to effect systematic structural change across most members of the OECD. Mergers can be government or sector driven and indeed, the drivers are often evident at both at system and institutional level. The literature has identified a wide range of drivers for mergers, which are often a combination of push and pull factors which are closely linked to the perceived advantages of mergers in HE. Davies (2013) argues that mergers are usually motivated by a mixture of desires and that mergers are generally seen as a culmination of drivers or push/pull forces, rather than the result of one particular motive. Hinfellar (2012) opines that while the decision to merge will be influenced by a complex, simultaneous interplay of push and pull factors, at least one of these push or pull factors should be so overwhelming that it drives the institution to go ahead and merge. Brown et al (2004) suggest that strong negative push factors tend to “overcome all barriers” when it comes to mergers and that without such push factors, a range of issues can be potentially deal breaking.

Rowley, (2012) proposed a tripartite classification to examine the key drivers of mergers in HE, based on strategic, academic and financial drivers. While this classification is useful, it does not differentiate between system level and institutional level drivers. Following my review of the literature, I have developed an alternative framework to conceptualise the key drivers for mergers, which is outlined in Figure 4 below.

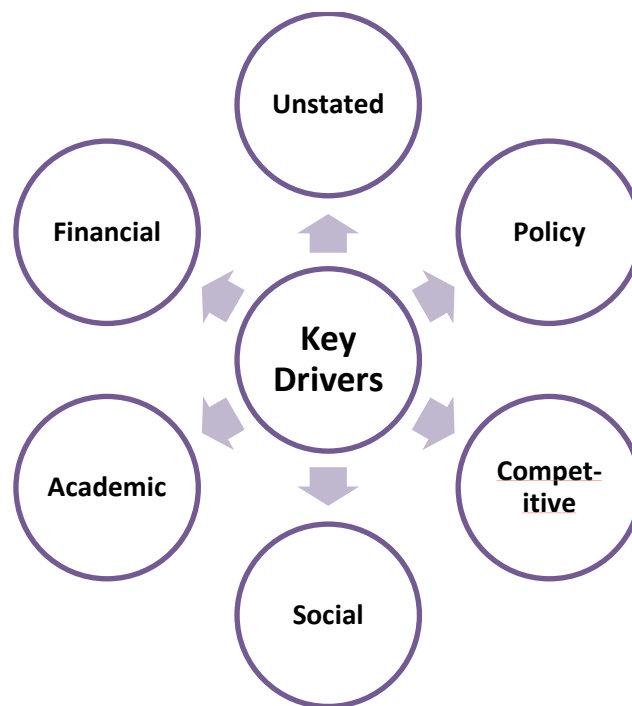


Figure 4: Conceptualisation of Key Drivers for Merger in HE

Firstly, I have identified policy drivers and social drivers, which are mainly external and primarily incited by government. These can be regarded as push factors, which are likely to arise from external pressures and can often generate defence mechanisms (Hinfellar, 2012). Secondly, I have identified competitive and academic drivers which are found primarily internally, by institutions themselves. These are often referred to as pull factors and can represent attractive options to organisations (Hinfellar, 2012). Thirdly, I have identified financial drivers, which can be either system level or institutionally based, and can act either as push or pull factors, depending upon the particular context. Finally, I have identified a category of ‘unstated’ drivers for mergers, which if mismanaged and miscommunicated may have a detrimental effect on the organisation. Fulop et al (2002) argue that these drivers are often presented in a more

acceptable and understood way during a merger process. These unstated drivers will be examined in more detail in my research.

The categories of drivers that I have identified from the literature are developed further in the table below, which categorises and summarises my proposed classification of the key drivers for/advantages of merger from the existing higher education literature.

Table 6: Key Drivers for Higher Education Mergers

| Category | Level | Push or Pull | Drivers/Advantages of Merger |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Policy Drivers | System Level/ External | Push | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align national educational and economic priorities (Harman and Meek, 2002) Address system level problems, particularly related to institutional fragmentation (Harman and Harman, 2013) Restructure the higher education sector and to build larger, more competitive and more sustainable institutions (Harman and Harman, 2013). A mechanism to abolish the traditional binary system (Harman, 1991) Facilitate institutional transformation within a national system (Davies, 2013) Avert the spiral of decline in small HEIs and facilitate the creation of critical mass (Davies J, 2013) “Mop up” and reconfiguration of the system (Davies, 2013) |
| Competitive Drivers | Institutional Level/ Internal | Pull | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen market position, nationally and/or internationally (HEFCE, 2012), (Davies, 2013) Prevent a competitor seizing a particular opportunity Move up the national/ international rankings (Davies, 2013) Obtain additional capacity and expertise (HEFCE, 2012) “Mutual growth” for the partner institutions and improving their competitive position (Harman & Harman, 2013) Facilitate HEIs moving to the next stage of their life cycle, allowing them to stimulate new initiatives, reconceptualise a new vision and expand capacity. (Davies, 2013) |
| Academic Drivers | Institutional Level/ Internal | Pull | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the scale, range and quality of research (HEFCE, 2012) Improve the scale, range and quality of teaching and learning (HEFCE, 2012) |

| | | | |
|-------------------|--|---------------|---|
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the student experience (HEFCE, 2012) • Move towards a more interdisciplinary system with a broader subject base (Davies, 2013) |
| Social Drivers | System Level/ External | Push | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to and participation in higher education (Harman and Meek, 2002) • Promote coherence and integration of education, research and development within a region (Davies, 2013) • Foster innovation (HEFCE, 2012) |
| Financial Drivers | System and Institutional Level/ Internal and External | Push/ Pull | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Rescue’ weak or non-viable institutions, (Harman and Meek, 2002) • Need for greater efficiencies (Harman and Meek, 2002) • Tackle financial problems (Harman & Harman, 2003) • Gain financial strength (HEFCE, 2012) • Ensure financial sustainability (HEFCE, 2012) • Financial strife (Fulop et al 2002) |
| Unstated Drivers | System and Institutional Level/ Internal and External | Push/ Pull | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political pressures (Fulop et al 2002) • Under management or mismanagement of organisations (Fulop et al 2002) |

In most HE mergers, there is a delicate interplay of these push/pull factors at play, with both system and institutional level drivers evident. Figure 5 below further conceptualises my proposed classification, providing a matrix indicating the interplay between system level and institutional drivers on the one hand, and the business and educational drivers on the other.

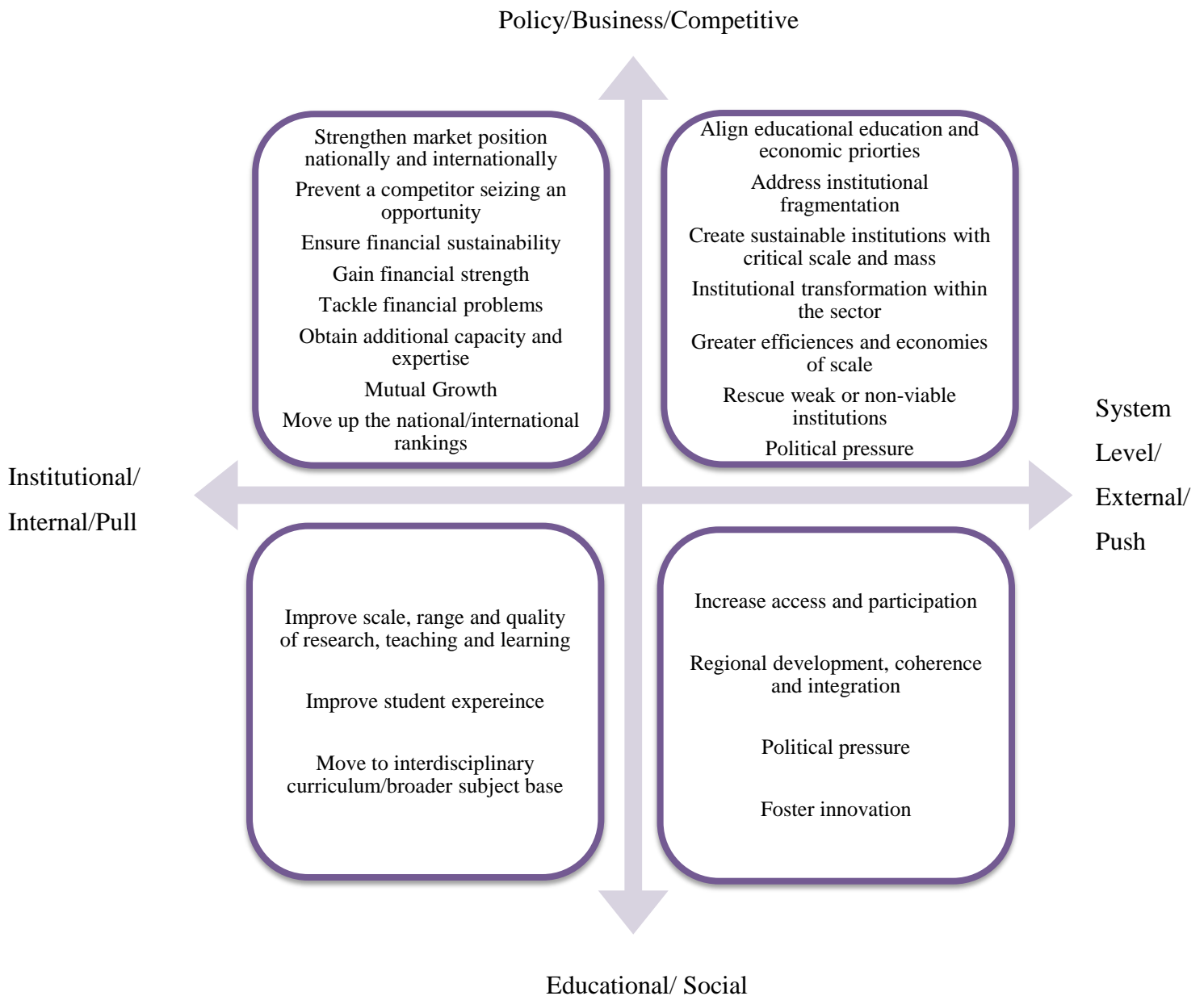


Figure 5: Relationship between System and Institutional Level Drivers for Merger

HEFCE (2010) state that the focus on the driver(s) for merger(s) has fluctuated as the external policy environment and economic context has changed. They argue it is likely that continued reductions in public expenditure, increasing demand for student places, increased expectations regarding quality of HE provision and growing competition from emerging economies will continue to provide an impetus for national governments and the HE sector to examine the full spectrum of the different models and types of collaborative activity, including full mergers of institutions (HEFCE, 2010).

As discussed earlier, the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DoES, 2011) clearly identifies system reconfiguration; access and participation; quality; the creation of a new TU sector and; the mopping up of fragmented IoTs to create institutions with critical mass and scale as the key drivers for change. Hazelkorn and Harkin (2014) state that change in the Irish HE system is being driven by an increasing demand for HE at a time when public funding is declining due to the global economic crisis and its manifestation in Ireland. They state there is a need for greater efficiency, enhanced quality, improved competitiveness and visibility and clearer alignment with national policy objectives. Hinfellar (2012) suggests that the drivers for mergers in the Irish context at system level relate to issues concerning fragmentation and sustainability, and at institutional level centre around institutional ambition and competitive positioning. These drivers clearly come within the categories proposed in my framework above.

3.5 Collaboration & Merger Typologies/Variables and Assumptions about their Impact upon Process

3.5.1 Introduction

The literature has identified a number of structural and cultural variables relating to the full spectrum of HE collaborations and merger activity, which can encompass a wide range of paradigms of institutional relationship, including co-operations, consortia, federations and mergers (Davies, 2013). These variables can have a considerable impact on both the collaboration and merger process and outcomes and are worthy of consideration when examining the factors at play during such a process. These variables are not mutually exclusive, and HE collaborations and mergers will usually be an amalgam of the various characteristics presented below. In their research, Harman and Harman (2003) identified the following variables, which have become widely accepted categories into which HE collaborations mergers can be classified. These variables are whether a collaboration or merger is voluntary or involuntary; a consolidation or take over; single or cross sector; two partner or multi-partner; and between institutions with similar or differing academic portfolios. From my broader research of mergers and acquisitions generally, I would also propose an overarching classification, based on whether the merger is between private or public sector HEIs, as an addition to Harman and Harman's existing framework, as this can have a significant effect on the nature of the merger.

3.5.2 Merger between Private or Public Sector HEIs

Mergers, acquisitions or take-overs between private HEIs are likely to be resource driven and according to (Desyllas, 2014) are primarily driven by economic/market forces such as the aim to increase market share and profitability, and to create synergies and economies of scale and learning. Private sector mergers between HEIs are driven by the HEIs themselves as a strategic response to competitive pressures, and the focus is primarily on value creation.

Mergers between public HEIs, on the other hand, are more likely to be government driven, and often occur against a backdrop of continual restructuring activities (Talbot and Johnson, 2007). They are primarily driven by a desire to achieve cost efficiencies and improve service (Frumkin, 2003). They are often framed in terms of collaboration or consolidation, rather than in the more aggressive acquisition mode evident in the private sector (O' Flynn et al, 2014).

3.5.3 Voluntary or Involuntary (Government or Sector Driven)

Voluntary collaborations and mergers are generally institutionally driven and occur where both parties fully consent to or indeed, co-initiate a collaboration or merger. Many academics, (Goedegeburre, 1992; Harman, 1996; Skodvin, 1999; Harman and Harman, 2003) argue that a merger which is voluntary is generally easier to organise and tends to be more successful than one which is involuntary. This may be due to a number of factors such as the greater degree of staff involvement in and ownership of the process, and a greater sense of willingness and belonging. Voluntary mergers often come about as a result of a changing competitive landscape and often follow other mergers in the sector (Goedegeburre, 2011). However, Harman and Harman (2002) argue that behind many voluntary mergers, there is often an external threat or some degree of government incentive, pressure or direction. Therefore, although a merger may appear to be voluntary, there are often external, push factors which leave the institution with little choice but to merge.

A collaboration or merger which is involuntary or forced often occurs where the impetus for collaboration or merger comes from an external force or body (Harman and Meek, 2002). These drivers were discussed above and categorised as system level drivers/push factors. If a proposed merger is forced, and one or both of the parties rejects the idea or benefits of merging, the merger process can become very arduous and laborious (Thompson, 2012). This is a point to which I will later return, as it is

particularly relevant in the context of my own research and warrants greater attention than the existing body of research has given it.

3.5.4 A Consolidation or Take-Over

Andrade et al (2001) found that in most mergers, there is a perception of ‘winner and loser’. The manner in which this perception is framed and managed will depend upon whether the merger is classified and presented as a take-over or as a consolidation. A take-over generally involves the take-over of a smaller/weaker institution by a larger/stronger institution. Take-overs tend to be simpler, with the smaller institution being assimilated into the larger institution, often as a distinct department or faculty.

A consolidation, defined by Harman and Harman (2003, p.32) as “two or more institutions of similar size coming together to form a new institution”, is generally assumed to be more laborious and presents greater organisational challenges than a take-over. With consolidations, difficult issues such as the choice of name for the new institution, the appointment of the new ‘Chief Executive’ and senior management team, the new academic structures and portfolio, and issues surrounding programme rationalisation need to be addressed. Often, when two parties are similar in size and status, considerable effort is required to create a ‘merger of equals’ to enable the proposal to be accepted. This can result in a more costly and inefficient merger process than could otherwise be the case. Parties may sometimes choose, for political reasons, to publically present the merger as a ‘consolidation’ rather than a ‘take-over’ (Harman and Harman, 2003). However, if this is at odds with widely held perceptions, it may result in a loss of credibility among staff, students and other stakeholders (HEFCE, 2012). Harman and Harman’s (2003) research found that despite presenting ‘a merger of equals’ there is often a dominant/stronger institution whose regulatory framework, policies and procedures, processes, operating systems, etc. are seen as the preferred option for the new institution. This can lead to a feeling of resentment amongst staff from the weaker institution(s).

3.5.5 Single-Sector or Cross-Sector

Single sector collaborations and mergers are those which involve institutions from one sector only (for example, a merger between two or more IoTs), as opposed to cross-sector, involving institutions from different sectors (for example, a merger between a university and an IoT, or between a FE and HE provider). Research has found that cross-sector collaborations and mergers can pose particular problems, especially when the institutions have distinctively different missions, roles, cultures and funding structures

(Harman and Robertson Cuninghame, 1995). In theory, at least, single sector collaborations mergers should be easier to manage (Harman and Robertson Cuninghame, 1995; Eastman and Lang, 2001), although this is another assumption which my research will test.

3.5.6 Two-Partner or Multi-Partner

Two partner collaborations and mergers tend to operate differently to multi-partner mergers. Two partner collaborations and mergers tend to be easier to organise, although Harman and Harman (2003) state that small institutions in two partner mergers sometimes work hard to attract additional partners into the merger negotiations to avoid being “swallowed-up” by a larger partner institution. Kyvik and Stensaker (2013) found that merger processes involving more than two institutions dramatically reduces the chances of reaching a merger decision.

3.5.7 Partners with Similar or Different Academic Portfolios

The final variable identified by Harman and Harman (2013) is whether the institutions have similar or different academic profiles. Eastman and Lang (2001) argue that merging institutions with complementary missions and academic profiles is easier than merging institutions which are radically different from each other, as the commonality in terms of academic mission and profile can often indicate a similar degree of commonality in academic culture. While this seems logical, merging institutions with similar academic profiles frequently forebodes major rationalisation of course offerings in order to achieve cost savings, which may trigger disagreement about the distribution of academic and administrative tasks and roles in the newly merged institution (Harman and Harman, 2003; Kyvik and Stenskar, 2013). My research will test the argument made by Eastman and Lang (2001) and also by Harman & Robertson Cunningham (1995) that merging institutions with complementary missions and academic profiles is easier, as the Irish Alliances all share very similar academic portfolios.

3.5.8 Summary of Merger Variables and their Impact upon the Merger Process

My review of merger variables from HE literature is summarised in Table 7 below, which focuses on what the literature has identified as the resultant impact of those key merger variables upon the merger process. However, the literature makes a lot of assumptions in this regard and my research aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on

merger variables and their impact upon the process by testing these assumptions in the Irish context.

Table 7: Merger Variables and Assumptions re their Impact upon the Merger Process:

| Merger Variables | Assumptions re Facilitatory Impact on Process | Assumptions re Inhibitory Impact on Process |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Private Sector | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiated and driven by the HEIs themselves as a strategic response to economic/competitive pressures • Lengthy pre-merger process involving due diligence (Desyllas, 2014). • Post-merger integration process focused on value creation. | |
| Public Sector | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to be government driven, and often occur against a backdrop of continual restructuring activities (Talbot and Johnson, 2007). • Primarily driven by a desire to achieve cost efficiencies and improve service (Frumkin, 2003). • Process often framed in terms of collaboration or consolidation (O' Flynn et al, 2014). |
| Voluntary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to organise (Harman and Harman, 2003). • Often follow other mergers in the sector (Goedegeburre, 2011). • Tend to be more successful (Goedegeburre, 1992; Harman, 1996; Skodvin, 1999; Harman and Harman, 2003). | |
| Involuntary | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More difficult to implement (Harman and Harman, 2003; Thompson 2012). • Likely to be resistance from partners (Harman and Harman, 2003). |
| Consolidation | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More laborious, costly and inefficient (Harman and |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| | | <p>Harman, 2003).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be careful not to lose credibility amongst stakeholders if it is really a ‘take-over’ (HEFCE, 2012). |
| Take over | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to be simpler – smaller institution assimilated into larger institution (Harman and Harman, 2003). | |
| Single sector | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared missions, cultures, regulatory framework and funding structures should make the process more straightforward (Harman and Robertson Cuninghame, 1995). | |
| Cross sector | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different missions, roles, cultures and funding structures between the sectors can often cause difficulties (Harman and Robertson Cuninghame, 1995). |
| Two partner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be easier to reach agreement (Harman and Harman, 2003). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small institutions in two partner mergers sometimes work hard to attract additional partners into the merger negotiations to avoid being “swallowed-up” by a larger partner institution (Harman and Harman, 2003). |
| Multi partner | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merger processes involving more than two institutions greatly reduces the chances of reaching a merger decision (Kyvik and Stensaker, 2013) |
| Similar academic portfolios | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonality in terms of academic mission and profile can often indicate a similar degree of commonality in academic culture (Eastman and Lang, 2001). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often predicts rationalisation of course offerings in order to achieve cost savings, which may trigger disagreement about the distribution of academic and administrative tasks and roles in the new merged institution (Harman and Harman, 2003; Kyvik and Stenskar, 2013). |
| Different academic portfolios | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences in academic mission and profile can indicate differences in academic culture, which can be problematic (Eastman and Lang, 2001). |

3.6 Merger as a Strategic and Political Policy Formation Process

As noted above, a decision to merge is likely to be the most difficult and far-reaching policy decision an organisation will ever take (Hinfellar, 2012), and how that decision is made and implemented is key to the outcome of the process. In terms of factors which impact upon the process, Davies (1985) suggests that they are numerous and reinforce and interplay with each-other both within and outside the HE system, making rational, planned policy formation and implementation difficult. He states that policy formation in HEIs is inevitably a political process and centres on the disposition of power; the capacity to control key organisational influences and; levers or incentives for the fulfilment of particular preferences.

This will have implications for HE alliances planning a merger, which will necessarily require the formation and implementation of a wide range of strategies and policies. Davies (2013) argues that highly rational models of entities may founder on the vagaries of micro-politics and ineffective processes. Davies (1985) categorises the type of policies formed by HEIs into strategic, substantive and climatic policies, and suggests that all are necessary to effect change. In the context of a merger proposal and process, all three categories of policy formation and implementation will be required; strategic policies, encompassing the decision to merge, partner choice, etc.; substantive policies encompassing procedural/operational matters such as HR policies, academic policies, etc. and; climatic policies, which are in essence cultural and are required to build trust and levels of engagement between the parties.

In order to achieve the objective and effect policy change, Davies (1985) proposes a four-phase 'political systems model' of policy formation for HEIs, based around Enderud's (1977) work. These phases consist of firstly, a '*garbage can*' phase which is a highly ambiguous period in which the problem must be defined; secondly, a '*negotiation and political*' phase, where a workable coalition of interests must be established; thirdly, a '*persuasion and legitimation phase*' which is essentially a collegial period where agreement is reached on policy lines of action; and fourthly, a '*bureaucratisation*' phase, where the policy is implemented. Davies (1985) elaborates on inputs, processes and outputs for each of these stages and opines that if any phase is missed, or is given insufficient time, problems may arise later during the policy formation process. He cites examples such as a failure to appreciate the magnitude and dynamics of political feeling generated by policy proposals, or reluctance of top

management to get involved in bargains and incentives to develop support for policy packages, as being some of the reasons why policy proposals may flounder. Davies' model is clearly applicable to the merger process within HEIs, offering a framework around which the merger process can be examined. Although the existing body of HE literature has not used this model in the context of mergers, it provides an insightful lens for conceptualising and examining why some merger proposals and processes might fail. Therefore this model will be drawn upon when examining the phases through which proposed mergers must progress.

3.7 Facilitatory and Inhibitory Factors in the Merger Process

My central research question focuses on facilitatory and inhibitory factors to merger processes in HE. It is therefore necessary to identify or develop a conceptual framework from the literature through which facilitatory and inhibitory factors relating to merger processes in HE, both at system and institutional level, can be identified and examined. This framework will both inform and frame my research design, data collection and analysis, and presentation of findings.

Much of the research published regarding mergers in HE to date focuses on evaluating the outcomes of a merger and identifying success factors, rather than focusing on the process and the factors which positively or adversely affect that process. Brown et al (2004, p.2) note that there is "not a great deal of information in the literature about process". This study aims to contribute in a significant way to the body of knowledge available in this regard.

HEFCE (2010), Harman and Harman (2003), Davies (2013) and Brown et al (2004), amongst others, have identified a number of factors which, based on lessons learnt from HEIs past experiences, can have a critical impact on the merger process. Recent research by Curry J (2015) also provides guidance on process in the HE context, albeit relating to university-city collaborations rather than mergers *per se*. Research undertaken by Brown et al (2004) is particularly useful, as the focus of their study was on the factors in the merger process which led to some merger discussions being abandoned while others led to implementation, rather than focusing on evaluating the outcome of one single merger. Brown et al (2004) had initially envisaged that their study would result in a checklist of 'do's and don'ts' for HE mergers, which would be easily attributable to either the successful or failed merger proposals. However, after analysing

data collected from their case studies, they found that this was not possible. Rather, they found that same key themes and issues arose in most of the proposed mergers they examined. They concluded that it is the combination in which these themes/factors occurred, and how they were addressed within the particular context of each merger that determines the outcome. This is an interesting finding and one which has not been given the attention it deserves in subsequent literature, which all too often seeks to produce a hard and fast guide to merger success. A more useful approach might be to investigate both what issues arose during the process and then how these were addressed within the particular context of the merger itself.

Brown et al (2004) also identified a range of potentially 'deal breaking' issues, which could inhibit or frustrate the merger process, and which are linked to the key themes that they identified in their research. Because of their emphasis on process over outcome and its relevance to my research, I adopted the key themes identified by Brown et al (2004) as an initial framework around which I would examine the literature, and have subsequently adapted this framework to include additional themes identified as relevant to the merger process from the wider body of HE merger and collaboration literature. This has facilitated the development of a conceptual framework presented in Figure 6 below, around which my interview and data collection schedule is based, data analysed and findings presented.



Figure 6: Key Factors Impacting upon the Merger Process in HE

3.7.1 Genesis of the Merger Proposal

The genesis or drivers of merger, whether they be push or pull factors, naturally have a significant impact on the merger process itself. Whether a merger is voluntary or involuntary can have a significant influence on the conduct of the partners and the extent to which there is real commitment to what is often a very long and demanding merger process. Voluntary mergers driven by pull factors tend to be easier to organise and more successful than those which are involuntary or driven by push factors (Goedegeburre, 1992; Harman, 1996; Skodvin, 1999; Harman and Harman, 2003). Brown et al (2004, p.10) found that HEIs tend to behave like private sector institutions, “holding on to their individuality and independence as long as possible and relinquishing these generally only

when severely threatened or when positive opportunities are significant.” They found that merger proposals often originated from proposals to increase collaboration. As mentioned earlier, HEFCE (2010) and others advise that all HEIs should explore all of the collaborative options open to them and make the decision on this basis.

Regardless of the push/pull factors driving the merger, the literature indicates that there must be a strong educational basis for the decision to merge. The reasons for merger should be clearly articulated and based on the educational case rather than on financial grounds to facilitate the process (HEFCE, 2010). This is a particularly important factor when it comes to getting ‘buy in’ from the academic communities in the individual institutions. Davies (2013) also highlights the importance of developing a shared vision, which is inspirational, rather than operational, and focusing upon this as the genesis for the proposed merger. This aligns with accepted change management frameworks, such as those proposed by Kotter (1996), who advocates the need to create a sense of urgency and a clear vision for change.

3.7.2 Role of Key Individuals within Merging Institutions

The need for senior individuals within merging institutions to provide strong leadership and commitment to the process is well documented. Brown et al (2004) found that senior figures must be prepared to champion the merger proposals. Again, this is in keeping with most change management literature which identifies the need to champion the change initiative within the organisation by building a powerful coalition of supporters (Kotter, 1996). Brown et al (2004) note that senior managers and especially the Vice Chancellors/Principals/Presidents of both institutions must be absolutely committed to the merger, as it is not credible to ask staff within the institution to take the merger proposal seriously if it is evident that those at the top of the institution are not fully committed. They state that there must be some personal chemistry between the key players, as well as an abundance of energy and commitment. They also suggest that ideally this level of commitment should be shown by the Chairmen of Councils or Boards of Governors and other key lay members. Indeed, despite their central role, the literature reviewed gave surprisingly little attention to the role of the Chair/Board of Governors in the merger process.

Brown et al (2004) and HEFCE (2010) have identified that early agreement on the position of the two heads of institution post-merger is an important issue, and can often be a reason that some merger proposals never progress past the initial stage(s). If one or

both heads are close to retirement, this can often be a driver/facilitator of the process, but can also be an inhibitory factor since the individual involved may be seen as having no stake in the new merged institution. HEFCE (2010) also note that agreement on a new senior management structure, and indeed, the full new organisational structure, and a team of internal staff dedicated to the merger process will act in a facilitatory manner.

Changes in key personnel during the process can act either as a facilitatory or inhibitory factor, depending upon the context. Generally, changes in key personnel will complicate and de-stabilise the process, particularly, if as Brown et al (2004) identified, the new personalities clash or if the new individuals are less committed or have a different view on how and/or if the merger process should proceed. To this end, HEFCE (2010) recommend that risk management plans should be put in place, including contingency plans in the event of key staff members leaving. However, in some contexts, it is possible that the loss of a particular individual who is a potential blocker could actually facilitate and the merger process.

3.7.3 Communication and Engagement with Stakeholders

The need to communicate clearly the vision and need for change is again a key step in any change management process (Kotter, 1996). In order to facilitate a merger process, it is crucial to communicate clearly and effectively with key stakeholders groups, which have been identified in the literature as being governors, staff, students and communities. Communication should focus on the academic case for merger and in line with best change management practice, should identify mutual benefits or ‘wins’ for institutions at an early stage in the process. There is a delicate balance for senior managers to achieve between the need to inform, consult, feedback and take account of views on one hand, and the need to direct and lead the project, which may require discretion, confidentiality and decisiveness, on the other. Locke (2007) argues that effective and targeted communication with staff, students and stakeholders is critical and that a clear communication strategy needs to be developed and implemented, being cognisant of the need to manage carefully stakeholder expectations and avoid rumour and conjecture, which can inhibit and damage the process. Brown et al (2004) identified that Senate/Academic Boards and Boards of Governors as two groups which require particular attention and convincing when it comes to merger, as they are often the most powerful voices within the HEI and may ultimately make the decision to merge or not. Again, the literature reviewed provides almost no consideration to the role of Academic Council/ Boards of Governors in

the merger process, despite the fact that they often hold decision making power within the institution.

Cartwright, Tytherleigh and Robertson (2007), Harman (2010) and Brown et al (2004) all highlight the importance of consulting and involving staff, who may be concerned about their job security. Such consultation, they stress, must be genuine and be reflected in the subsequent merger process to avoid heightening negativity towards the merger process. Harman (2000) recommends that to facilitate the process, guarantees be given as soon as possible in the process to staff about security of employment, where feasible.

In relation to mergers between large and small institutions, the identification of benefits such as opportunities of staff development and advancement, better research facilities and a more research orientated culture, to staff at the smaller institution has been identified as a factor which can facilitate the process and make the idea of a takeover more palatable (Brown et al, 2004). However, this can also create fears within the larger institution which may be concerned about dilution of expertise and resources and may question what benefits they will accrue from the process.

Finally, Brown et al (2004) found that handling local and national media interest is an important factor in the merger process. They found that if properly briefed, the media could build up external support and counter internal rumours. However, if the institutions did not engage effectively with the media, they found that that the media could serve to bolster opposition to the process.

3.7.4 Processes & Project Management

There is a clear need to establish, resource, implement and review an agreed merger process, both on inter and intra institutional levels. Harman and Harman (2003) have identified that an effective merger planning and implementation process with realistic timescales and a strong framework for managing the change process post-merger is a crucial facilitatory factor in the merger process. Davies (2013) echoes this, and provides that the development and progressive implementation of a project action plan with internal and external monitoring is crucial to success.

On an intra-institutional level, the literature indicates that senior managers need to identify and accept at the outset the significant commitment required from them in terms of time and energy, and recognise that the whole process may take a number of years. The

provision of a dedicated project manager has also been found to act as a facilitatory factor, although the absence of one has not been shown to be inhibitory (Brown et al, 2004).

On an inter-institutional level, the literature has identified the importance of having agreed and appropriate joint structures/committees/groups, with equal representation from the partners, regardless of institutional size. In addition, ensuring that key Governor/Council meetings/decisions take place at the same time was also cited as a facilitatory factor (Brown et al, 2004). A merger 'project management' office also needs to be established by the institutions.

3.7.5 Role of External Change Agents

The role or influence of external change agents or brokers, with no vested interest or commitment to either institution, has also been found to facilitate the merger process by ensuring neutrality and promoting trust between partners, particularly at the early stages of the process (Brown et al, 2004). These change agents may be appointed by the merging institutions either jointly or separately, or may be appointed by the government or by the relevant Higher Education Regulatory/Policy Body. Unfortunately there is very little empirical evidence in the literature about the role or impact of these external change agents in the process, which is potentially very significant.

These external change agents can provide a detached and independent perspective and can make a dis-partisan contribution to the merger process. There are numerous potential advantages to the use of external change agents, particularly if appointed jointly by the merging institutions. The external change agent can advise and assist the institutions on the merger process, particularly on its micro-political aspects. The external change agent can engage in research on behalf of the parties and can share his/her existing knowledge merger processes. The external change agent can perform an educative role, increasing the parties understanding of specific issues which may arise, such as financial and legal issues, etc. Finally, the external change agent can prepare positional papers for the partners to examine, discuss and adopt as required, and can assist in drafting other relevant documentation.

It is of course crucial that the external change agent has the necessary expertise in in HE mergers to be of real benefit to the process. Otherwise, the external change agent might inhibit, rather than facilitate the merger. It is also important that the external change agent is supported and facilitated by the merging institutions. Therefore it is ideal if the parties themselves jointly agree on the appointment of external change agents, who

will act impartially, and who may operate as an independent mediator between them at difficult stages during the process. On the other hand, an external change agent appointed externally (perhaps by the government or Higher Education Regulatory/Policy Body), and forced upon the parties, may in fact be counterproductive to the process. My research will examine further the manner of appointment, role and influence of these change agents on the merger process in the Irish context.

3.7.6 Culture

Culture within an organisation refers to the taken-for-granted values, underlying assumptions, expectations, and beliefs which describe organisations and their members (Cameron, 2007). Cameron (2007, p.430) notes that most discussions of organisational culture including those by Cameron & Ettington (1988), O'Reilly & Chatman (1996) and Schein (1996) agree that culture is a socially constructed attribute of organisations which serves as the social glue which binds organisations together and that it represents “how things are around here,” or the prevailing ideology that people carry inside their heads. Schein (1996) argues that in this way, culture affects the way organisation members think, feel, and behave. Schwartz and Davies (1981, p.3) define culture as a “pattern of beliefs and expectations shared by the organisation’s members. These beliefs and expectations produce norms that powerfully shape the behaviour of individuals and groups in the organisations.” Schein (1985, p.9) defines culture as

a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaption and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.

Peterson and Spencer (1991, p.142) opine that culture is the “deeply embedded patterns of organisational behaviour and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs or ideologies that members have about their organisation or its work.” Drennan, (1992, p.3) defines culture as “how things are done around here”. It is what is typical to the organisation, the habits, the prevailing attitudes, and the grown-up pattern of accepted and expected behaviour.

The importance of understanding organisational culture is well documented in the literature. Schein (2010) argues that an understanding of organisational culture is crucial to illustrate the existence of sub-cultural dynamics within organisations and to understand how culture can act as a source of resistance to organisational learning, development and planned change. It is clear, therefore, that the prevailing culture within a HEI is

potentially an inhibitory factor to any change management or merger process undertaken within that organisation.

Smerek (2010, p.381) notes that cultural analysis of HE organisations first began in the 1960's, with Clark (1963) and subsequently Clark and Trow (1966). However, it was not until the late 1980's that the importance of organisational culture was fully recognised and the cultural perspective on HE was developed (Denison, 1990; Weick, 1985). Smerek (2010) argues that organisational culture in HEIs is the result of three key factors; the organisations unique history (Clark, 1970, 1972); its leadership (Schein, 1985) and critical events (Pettigrew, 1979). The importance of understanding organisational culture, particularly in relation to change management, is well documented in the literature. Schein (2010) argues that an understanding of organisational culture is crucial to understand how culture can act as a source of resistance to planned change. In HE, much of the research on organisational culture has focused on the link between the culture of the organisation and the attainment of its goals and vision. Davies, (2013) argues that policy formation in HEIs takes place within institutional frameworks, where culture is a factor, therefore an understanding of culture allows an insight into how and why an institution behaves in the way that it does, and allows that institution manage change and implement strategy more effectively. He argues that a university culture may have to evolve and shift in order to respond to and support internally and externally stimulated initiatives and that cultural change may be required before any strategic change is initiated. Wind and Main (1999) identified that culture is a major challenge in change management initiatives among HEIs because many faculty members consider knowledge as proprietary and are not willing share it freely, using knowledge as a source of power. Detert et al (2000) found that the prevailing culture of an organisation can sabotage management change efforts before they even begin. Ramachandran et al (2011, p.616) argue that for change management within HE to be effective, a conducive culture is required. They state that

an investigation of the type of organisational culture in the HEIs concerned will create the platform for the planning and execution of organisation-wide change management efforts, including the adoption of innovative strategies and practices.

Various models and frameworks have been developed to assist in the diagnosis, classification and explanation of organisational culture. Clark (1983) developed a model of culture which differentiated between freedom, equity, loyalty and competence respectively. Handy (1993) argued that culture could be classified as being concerned with person, role, power or task. McNay (1995) developed a model of organisational

culture for HEIs based on four organisational types – collegium, bureaucracy, corporation and enterprise. He noted that all four cultures exist in most universities, but are distributed differently. In relation the *collegium* culture, McNay (1995) noted that this typically involved institutional freedom from external controls and a focus on academic autonomy. Many traditional and long established universities, he argued, could be categorised as collegiate. In a *bureaucratic* culture, the focus is on regulation, consistency and equality. The organisation is characterised by demarcation of functions and decision making is often vested with committees and vertical cycles of approval. Stability and control are important, but may militate against change efforts. McNay's research identified the 1970's polytechnics in the UK as a model of bureaucratic hierarchy in HE, focused on output, autonomy and accountability. In a *corporate* culture, the executive asserts authority, with the vice-chancellor as chief executive. Decision making is often political. Handy (1993) argues that this is a culture for crisis, not conformity. Finally, McNay (1995) argues that an *enterprise* culture is one which is focused on market demands and meeting the needs of the customer. It has a clear strategy and leadership is devolved. Decision making is decentralised and there is an entrepreneurial ethos. McNay (1995) argues that this is the emergent culture in higher education due to the squeeze on public funding of universities and the consequent need for independent income generation.

It is evident from the above that cultural issues can be a significant factor in change management efforts, and there is no larger change for an organisation to face than merger. Harman (2002) and Harman and Harman (2003) have identified the powerful influence which culture has in some merger situations. Buono and Bowditch (1989) note that the 'thicker' the culture and the greater the degree of shared beliefs and values is evident, the more potent the influence the culture's influence will be. Brown et al (2004) found that differences in culture can surface during the merger process and may be identified in different communication strategies and practices between the two organisations. In particular, they found that perceived differences in academic standing between two merging institutions can give rise to formidable opposition from academic staff based on concerns regarding academic reputation. Harman and Harman (2003) note that although merging cultures appears to be less of a challenge in horizontal mergers, it is a nonetheless a particularly difficult task for HE leaders to manage merging divergent cultures into coherent educational communities which display loyalty and commitment to the new institution. Even mergers amongst institutions of the same type, which might

appear to an external commentator to be straightforward, can internally be viewed as very difficult due to diverse cultures, histories, practices, structures and problems (Shaw 2003). It is clear, therefore, that culture will have a significant impact upon the merger process, and warrants investigation as part of any empirical study in the area.

3.7.7 Structures

The literature reviewed indicated that choices about future organisational management structures, policies, procedures and practices has a significant impact on the merger process. Reputation and branding are particularly important to HEIs and decisions regarding the name of the new institution, for example, can present difficulties in this respect (Brown et al, 2004), particularly when dealing with consolidations between institutions of roughly equal size. Harman (2000) recommends that a decision be made as early as possible about the name of the institution. However, Brown et al (2004) found that one institution employed a deliberate strategy of leaving the difficult issue of the name until the end of the process, until all other issues had been resolved and the decision to merger was made. While this worked in that case, it may be a risky strategy to recommend to others. In addition to the name, deciding upon the location of the headquarters of the newly merged university may also be problematic to the process, and may be a bone of contention amongst the partners, particularly where the merger is being presented as a merger of equals. Although the literature is silent on this point, the location of the headquarters on either of the partners existing campuses might be perceived as something of a conquest and could lead to difficulties in the process, as is the case in one of the Irish Alliances. How these structural issues are dealt with will be critical to the process. Likewise, the adoption of one institutions policies, procedures, systems and practices over the others can be seen as a sign of a ‘victory’ and is often best avoided, particularly in consolidations. An additional factor identified by the literature which had a potential inhibitory effect on the merger process is the legal basis for the merger. Again, this was particularly an issue in consolidations, or ‘mergers of equals’, where any hint of one institution taking over the other could lead to a stand-off between the partners (Brown et al, 2004).

3.7.8 Trust and Understanding

Trust has been defined as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another” (Rousseau et al, 1998, p. 395) and is particularly important when undertaking

organisational change. Brown et al (2004) and Harman and Harman (2003) identified the level of trust and understanding between the key individuals in merging institutions as a key success factor in HE mergers. Indeed, Brown et al (2004) found trust to be the most critical factor during the process. They argue that establishing, earning and maintaining trust between the two organisations is crucial to facilitating and sustaining the process, and that it should not be assumed that trust will take care of itself. Indeed, wider studies by Mohr and Spekman (1994), Cullen et al. (2000), Abodor (2005) and Kale and Singh (2009), all support the proposition that trust is an essential ingredient in successful inter-organisational collaborations and partnerships. The concept of trust is a complex phenomenon, in that it arises at different levels of analysis; individual or interpersonal trust; organisational or inter-group trust, and inter-organisational trust (Bachmann & Zaheer, 2006). In the context of HE mergers, trust at all three levels is required, with inter-organisational trust being particularly significant.

It is therefore critically important for merging institutions to establish and maintain trust throughout any merger process. When it comes to establishing trust, research has found that a previous history of collaboration between the partners is particularly useful, as it establishes and develops a level of trust between the organisations before the formal merger process begins. Thomson and Perry (2006) found that a previous history of collaboration was an important antecedent to successful inter-organisational collaborations, and that a positive history of successful joint initiatives between the partners can lead to greater confidence and willingness to take risks on new or larger projects, such as a merger. On the other hand, a history typified by negative incidents, failed projects, and misunderstandings can result in reluctance to commit to further joint work or even cause representatives of organisations to avoid contact and communication.

However, in many instances, this ‘ideal’ prior history of successful inter-organisational collaborations may not exist between potential partners. In such situations Huxham (2003) argues that the focus must be on building trust between partners. Huxham and Vangen (2005) developed a trust-building loop (see Figure 7 below), which can be used as a model to build and maintain trust between collaborating and/or merging organisations. It focuses on aiming for realistic and successful outcomes (which are initially modest), and using this as a base for reinforcing trusting attitudes and gaining underpinnings for more ambitious collaborations. It also identifies the need for the partners to trust each other initially, to be willing to be vulnerable and take a risk, while

acknowledging that the partners form expectations about the future of the collaboration based on reputation or past behaviours or contracts and agreements.

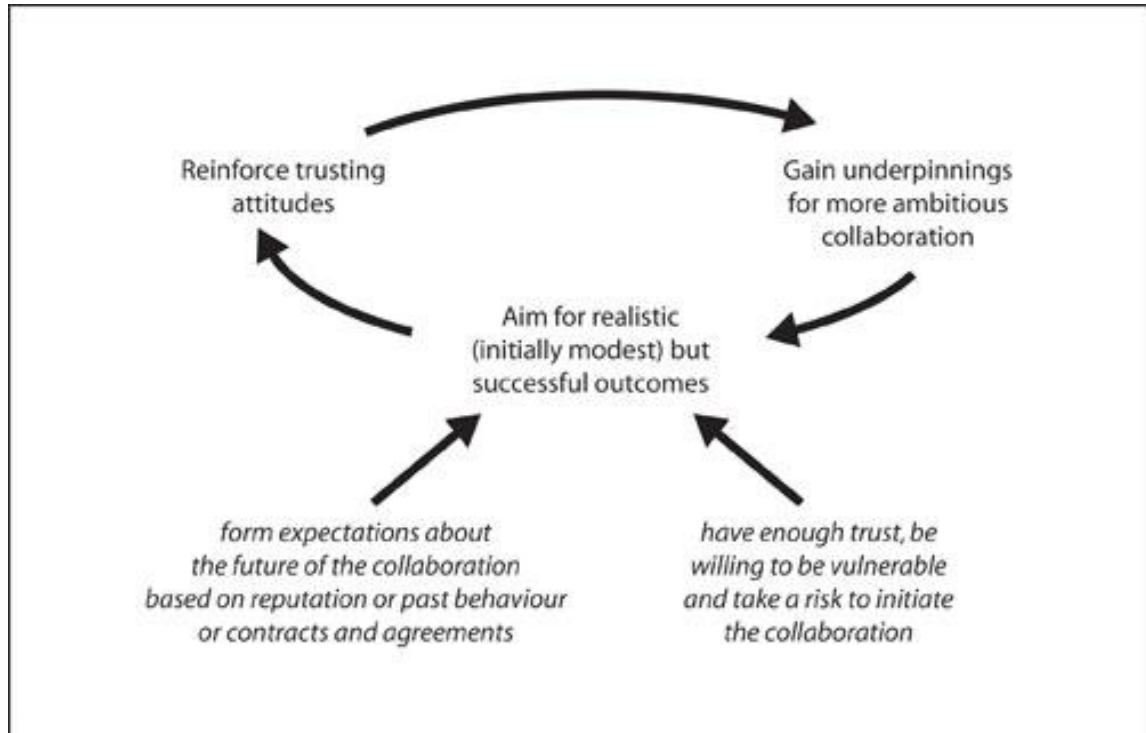


Figure 7: Huxham and Vangen's (2005) Trust Building Loop

Huxham and Vangen (2005) also identify the need to sustain the development of the trust-building loop by maintaining continuous attention to the dynamics of collaboration and making adjustments in response to changes in the individuals representing the organisations. Indeed, a change in key personnel during a merger/collaboration was identified by Brown et al (2004) and Dyer & Chu (2000), in Zaheer & Harris (2006), as one of the critical factors which could lead to a loss of trust which had been established, as it is these key personnel/executives who shape alliance formation and issue resolution (Zaheer, Lofstrom, & George, 2002 in Zaheer & Harris, 2006). Huxham and Vangen (2005) specifically identify a number of processes which can be used to sustain trust between organisations, including managing dynamics and power imbalances, and nurturing the collaborative relationship by paying attention to the management of communication, credit recognition, joint ownership, varying levels of commitment, and conflicting views on aims and agendas.

It is clear from the above that a lack of trust or the loss of trust which has been built up is one of the potentially key inhibitory factors to HE mergers, although the literature does not provide many examples which might indicate how this occurs, particularly in the HE sector. There is less evidence still of how this trust, once lost, might be repaired (Zaheer and Harris, 2006). Curry (2015) provides some useful guidance for HEIs in this respect. She recommends that collaborating institutions should document and understand the history of their relationship, and the fact that there may be different interpretations of that history. She argues that prior negative incidents should be identified and addressed to the best ability of both parties so that each organisation is open to opportunities and responsive to the other institution. She identifies the need to accept and maintain a positive and respectful relationship between the parties and establish a culture of responsiveness and relevance. She argues that it is critical to identify a shared vision or purpose between the partners, and that this will build understanding and trust over time. She notes that repairing a relationship which has been damaged is different from starting a new relationship, and recommends that in such a situation, if both parties are committed to resetting the relationship, they should start with small projects to gain confidence. She also argues that in such situations, future conflict is likely and that a pre-agreed dispute resolution mechanism/process, such as an external or joint mediator, might be useful. Finally, Curry (2015) recommends that the partners should communicate regularly using a variety of approaches and venues and should encourage and develop multi-layer points of sustained contact. All of these steps may help build or re-establish inter-organisational trust which may have been corroded.

3.7.9 Financial & Legal Issues

A key part of any merger process is the preparation of the business case for merger, incorporating a due diligence exercise and financial projections for the new institutions (Brown et al, 2004). This can raise a number of issues including the need to bid for or raise investment funding from the funding agency or external stakeholders and the need to justify additional short term costs/resources required to support the process. Such funding may be necessary to secure additional posts such as a project manager, or to align systems (such as IT, library, administrative, etc.) or conditions of employment in the two merging institutions. This may in some cases amount to a significant amount of investment and clearly, the non-availability of such funding or additional resources can be a significant inhibitory factor to the process (Brown et al, 2004). In addition, institutions may be

required to demonstrate projected longer term recurrent savings and/or increased income as a result of the merger, and this can also cause difficulties. Brown et al (2004) found it is crucial to involve the relevant funding/government agency from an early stage of the merger process to ensure sufficient time to answer questions and secure funding. In this regard, Harman and Harman (2003) opine that merging institutions should be realistic about the likely costs of the merger process and the potential level of savings which may be realised. Fielden and Markham (1997) and Kyvik (2002) also warn that care must be taken with many of the claims made about potential economies of scale. Brown et al (2004) warn against ‘loading up’ initial proposals as this could result in unrealistic targets being set. HEIs, or indeed governments, may see mergers as a way of quickly reducing costs and may use cost saving arguments to strengthen the business case. However, mergers require additional costs and money to be spent in the short term and perhaps even medium term on people, property and technology (HEFCE, 2010). Longer term savings may eventually accrue, although there appears to be a lack of publically available information about the outcomes and financial impact of mergers amongst HEIs (HEFCE, 2010).

Finally, institutions need to conduct a due diligence on the financial and legal risks involved in the merger. This should be undertaken by an independent party, and may unearth any number of potential financial or legal risks which may cast doubt over the attractiveness of the merger. The relative financial positions of the partner institutions are also an important consideration. Brown et al (2004) found that in cases where one of the institutions had financial difficulties, it was more difficult to avoid the perception that the financially stronger institution was coming to the rescue of the weaker one, thus undermining the ‘merger of equals’ which appears to be so critical to success during the merger process

3.7.10 Support from Government and Government Agencies

System level factors which impact upon the merger process generally fall under this theme/category, and can have an enormous impact upon the merger process. Davies (2013) and Harman and Harman (2003) note the crucial role government plays in facilitating the collaboration and merger planning and implementation process through a variety of factors. Firstly, they argue that the provision of clarity on the overall shape of the system before inviting initiatives and clear articulation of merger terminology, concepts, goals and rationale, is critical. Secondly, they state that government agencies must provide

advice, support, guidance and funding to participating institutions. Thirdly, a clear process for completing the initiative, in terms of a limited number of stages, a relatively short timescale to maintain momentum and avoid drift, and clear criteria (if any), are required. Davies (2013) also cites the provision of a range of legitimate and clearly articulated organisational options for HEIs to consider as a facilitatory factor. Clarification of contentious issues about staffing and salary levels, the enactment of enabling legislation and appointment of interim senior management and governance structures may also be required.

Government/government agencies should also understand the model/paradigm of the proposed new entity and of the system boundary conditions necessary to make it work in the national and local interest (Davies, 2013). For example, if the government wishes to create entrepreneurial TUs, as is the case in the Irish context, it must ensure that the necessary enabling conditions to achieve this type of entity prevail. In particular, institutions must be provided with the necessary degree of institutional autonomy which would usually be expected of entities of that type, particularly in relation to staff contracts, financial control, funding models, academic regulation, etc.

In this regard, Davies (2013) has developed a continuum of government/agency positioning on collaborations and mergers, adopted from Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1976) model (See Table 8 below). Davies (2013) argues that government/government agencies can adopt a variety of positions from 'Tells' to 'Delegates' when it comes to collaboration and merger activity, and this model can be used to analyse the role of government/government agencies in merger activity.

Table 8: J.L. Davies (2014) Continuum of System/Institutional Behaviour, Adapted from Tannerbaum and Schmidt

| | TELLS | SELLS | TESTS | CONSULTS | SHARES | JOINS | DELEGATES |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|---|
| <p>Use of Authority</p> <p>Minister/System Level</p> | Owens and resolves total problem and instructs | Resolves problem, informs and persuades | Resolves problem but seeks opinion and reviews decision | Determines objectives Proposes alternatives Seeks recommendation | Defines problem Specifies objectives Seeks solution | Specifies problem and participates in problem Determines objectives and resolves problem with Institution Accepts commitment to action | Acts on decision Owns and resolves total problem |
| <p>Areas of Activity at HEI</p> <p>Level</p> | Acts | Receives explanation and acts | Expresses views on potential problems in a proposed decision | Discusses alternative solutions and gives recommendations | Examines objectives Considers alternatives Gives solutions | | |

A variety of factors will dictate government positioning along this continuum including; assumptions regarding respect for institutional autonomy; patterns of accountability; perceptions regarding maturity and responsiveness; the strength of political imperatives and the severity of the perceived crisis/concerns; the interest of various ministries in the collaboration/merger and its potential; sustaining institutional commitment, momentum and motivation; and finally, the collaborative or adversarial nature of the process or dialogue. When these factors are applied to the Irish context, it is clear that government respect for institutional autonomy in the IoT sector appears low and that extremely high levels of institutional accountability are required. In this sense, the Irish IoT sector is heavily regulated by government/government agencies, and from an international perspective, more closely resembles a branch of the civil service than it does a paradigm of a TU. If this is to continue, it will clearly be problematic and discourse around this issue is critical. The IoT sector, although over 40 years in existence, has only relatively recently been given devolved authority in respect of granting academic awards and is perceived, particularly by government agencies, as relatively immature as a result. There are strong political imperatives/motivating factors to merge IoTs in the Irish context, namely the desire to create regional universities to attract investment and jobs, and to be seen to rationalise and save money in the wake of the recent economic crisis.

Taking these factors into account, along with evidence of the approach of government to the matter to date, the Irish government's positioning on merger activity in the IoT sector is certainly closer to the 'Tells' rather than 'Delegates' end of the spectrum, with a high level of authority being exercised at system/political level, particularly in the case of some of the proposed alliances. It is of course, possible that this positioning may change over time and indeed, even during the merger process itself. For example, the political imperatives involved may become stronger or weaker, depending upon the particular context, and this may see a shift in government positioning. In Ireland, for example, another financial crisis, a change of government or even a change in regional political representatives, may possibly shift government positioning along the continuum.

Failure of government or government agencies to provide the requisite levels of clarity, support or institutional autonomy required could clearly be an inhibitory factor to the entire merger process, although there is little empirical research in the literature on this area. In the Irish context, there is some evidence to suggest that the government/government agencies have not provided the requisite level of clarity and support required, particularly in relation to certainty around key terminology, goals,

rationale, process, criteria, financial supports and guidance. There is also clear evidence to suggest that the Irish government has not provided the level of institutional autonomy one would legitimately expect in order to create entrepreneurial TUs, and appear to be exercising a rather directive approach to the process. My research will investigate this in more depth, offering empirical evidence on the critical role of these system level factors on the merger process.

3.7.11 Timescale

In relation to timelines, Harman and Harman (2003) opine that mergers work best if institutions that have agreed to merge can move as quickly as possible to merger implementation. Long delays increase anxiety levels and give opponents increased time to plot against the merger and can ultimately lead to the demise of the process. Research by Brown et al (2004) echoes this and found the shorter the time scale between the decision to merge and the legal implementation of that decision, the better, as it reduces the chances of unforeseen changes in key people, limits time for opposition to gain momentum and minimises the chances of external changes undermining the proposal. Davies (2013) notes that the generation and maintenance of momentum in the process is crucial to its success. Davies (2013) also advocates the generation and maintenance of confidence, calmness, coherence and stability as a facilitatory factor, although the literature in general appears to be silent on this point. Therefore consideration of the impact of timelines, momentum and stability on the merger process is considered necessary as part of my research.

3.7.12 Summary of Facilitatory & Inhibitory Factors from Literature

Review

Table 9 below provides a summary of the key themes and related facilitatory/success and inhibitory factors which impact upon the merger process.

Table 9: Key Themes/Factors Impacting Upon the Merger Process in Higher Education

| Key Theme | Related Facilitatory/ Success Factor(s) | Related Inhibitory Factor(s) |
|---|--|--|
| Genesis of the Merger Proposal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voluntary mergers driven by pull factors at institutional level (Goedegeburre, 1992; Harman, 1996; Skodvin, 1999; Harman and Harman, 2003). Agreement on a shared vision for the new entity which is inspirational rather than operational (Davies, 2013). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forced mergers driven by push factors at sectoral level (Goedegeburre, 1992; Harman, 1996; Skodvin, 1999; Harman and Harman, 2003). Failure to explore the full range of collaborative options before deciding to merge (HEFCE, 2010). Failure to produce a compelling academic vision Brown et al (2004). |
| Role of Key Individuals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior figures prepared to champion and lead the merger proposals (Brown et al, 2004). Absolute commitment to the process from leaders (Brown et al, 2004). Personal chemistry between the key players (including Chairmen of Councils or Boards of Governors and other key lay members, as well as an abundance of energy and commitment to the process (Brown et al, 2004). Agreement at an early stage on a new senior management structure (HEFCE (2010). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to agree at an early stage on the position of the two heads of institution post-merger (Brown et al, 2004). Lack of commitment on behalf of senior management (Brown et al, 2004). Changes in key personnel during the process Brown et al (2004). |
| Communication & Engagement with Stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, timely and genuine communication and consultation with staff, students and stakeholders (Locke, 2007; Cartwright et al, 2007; Harman, 2010; Brown et al, 2004). Manage carefully stakeholder expectations and avoid rumour and conjecture (Locke, 2007). Focus on the academic case for merger and identify mutual benefits or 'wins' for institutions at an early stage in the process (Brown et al, 2004). Timely and considered communication with Senate/Academic Boards and Boards of Governors (Brown et al, 2004). Guarantees to staff about security of employment, where feasible (Harman, 2000). Proper briefing and handling local and national media interest (Brown et al, 2004). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor/ad-hoc communications with staff and stakeholders (Locke, 2007; Cartwright et al, 2007; Harman, 2010; Brown et al, 2004). Ineffective engagement with media (Brown et al, 2004). |
| Processes & Project Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish, resource, implement and review an agreed merger process (Harman and Harman, 2003; Brown et al, 2004; Davies, 2013). The provision of a dedicated project manager (Brown et al, 2004). Acceptance of significant commitment required in terms of time and | |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| | <p>energy, and recognition that the whole process may take a number of years (Brown et al, 2004).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of agreed and appropriate joint structures/committees/groups, with equal representation from the partners, regardless of institutional size (Brown et al, 2004). • Ensuring that key Governor/Council meetings/decisions took place at the same time (Brown et al, 2004). | |
| Role of External Change Agents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of an 'independent' external change agent, with no vested interest/commitment to either institution to lead discussions/chair groups (Brown et al, 2004), draft documentation and position papers, provide expertise, act as a mediator between the parties, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External change agent appointed by the government or Higher Education Regulatory/Policy Body, and forced upon the parties, may in fact be counterproductive to the process. • External change agent without the necessary higher education merger expertise |
| Structures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early decisions making about name and legal basis of new institution (Harman, 2000; Brown et al, 2004). • Agreement at an early stage on a new organisational structure (HEFCE, 2010) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disagreement about the name of the new institution or the legal basis for merger (Brown et al, 2004). • Disagreement about the location of the headquarters of the new institution • Adoption of one institution's policies, procedures, systems and practices over and to the exclusion of the others (Brown et al, 2004). |
| Culture & Mission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar/shared organisational cultures (Brown et al, 2004; Harman, 2002; Harman and Harman, 2003, Shaw 2003). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived or actual differences in institutional culture (Brown et al, 2004; Harman, 2002; Harman and Harman, 2003). • Different academic standing of the two institutions, real or perceived Brown et al (2004). |
| Trust & Understanding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing, earning and maintaining trust (Brown et al, 2004; Mohr and Spekman, 1994; Cullen et al., 2000; Abodor, 2005; Kale and Singh 2009; Curry 2015). • Previous history of collaboration between the partners (Brown et al, 2004; Thomson and Perry, 2006) • Document and understand the history of the partners' prior relationship (Curry, 2015). • Accept and maintain a positive and respectful relationship and establish a culture of responsiveness and relevance (Curry, 2015). • Identify a shared vision or purpose (Curry, 2015). • Start with small projects to gain confidence, particularly if there is distrust between the partners (Curry, 2015). • Prior agreement on a dispute resolution mechanism/process, such as an external or joint mediator (Curry, 2015) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trust or failure to establish trust (Brown et al, 2004). • Loss of trust which has been built up (Brown et al, 2004). • Change in key personnel (Brown et al, 2004; Dyer & Chu, 2000 in Zaheer & Harris, 2006). |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular communication between the parties using a variety of approaches and venues and develop multi-layer points of sustained contact (Curry, 2015). | |
| Financial & Legal Issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability of required funding and resources required (Brown et al, 2004; Davies, 2013). Relatively stable and secure financial position of both parties (Brown et al, 2004). Due diligence carried out by an independent body/person (Brown et al, 2004). Realistic expectations about the likely costs of the merger process and the potential level of savings which may be realised (Fielden and Markham, 1997; Kyvik 2002; Harman and Harman, 2003; Brown et al, 2004). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-availability of required funding or additional resources for process (Brown et al, 2004). Difficulties demonstrating projected longer term recurrent savings to increased income as a result of the merger (Brown et al, 2004). Significant financial or legal liabilities identified by due diligence (Brown et al, 2004). Differences in the relative financial positions of the partner institutions (Brown et al, 2004). |
| Support from Govt. and Govt. Agencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of clarity from outset on the overall shape of the system (Davies, 2013; Harman and Harman, 2003). Advice, support, guidance and funding to participating institutions (Davies, 2013). A clear process for completing the initiative and clear criteria, if any are required (Davies, 2013). Clarification at an early stage of contentious issues about staffing and salary levels (Davies, 2013). Enactment of enabling legislation if required (Davies, 2013). Appointment of interim senior management and governance structures, if required (Davies, 2013). Involvement of the relevant funding/government agency from an early stage of the merger process (Brown et al, 2004). Government/government agencies should also understand the model/paradigm of the proposed new entity and of the system boundary conditions necessary to make it work in the national and local interest (Davies, 2013). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of availability of finance from the funding councils and external organisations to deliver on key aims (Brown et al, 2004). Failure of government or government agencies to provide the requisite level of clarity, supports or institutional autonomy (Davies, 2013). Failure of government/government agencies to understand the model/paradigm of the proposed new entity and of the system boundary conditions necessary to make it work in the national and local interest (Davies, 2013). |
| Timescale | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short time scale between the decision to merge and the legal implementation of that decision (Harman and Harman, 2003; Brown et al, 2004). Generation and maintenance of momentum confidence, calmness, coherence and stability (Davies, 2013). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long delays (Harman and Harman, 2003; Brown et al, 2004). |

3.8 Gaps in the Literature & Expected Contribution of the Study

While there is an existing body of literature on mergers in HE relating to drivers, variables and critical success factors, there are some clear gaps and limitations to what we already know on this subject. My research aims to make a theoretical, geographical and practical contribution to the existing body of literature on HE mergers, particularly in relation to the *process* of mergers in HE.

From a theoretical perspective, my research aims to test assumptions made in the HE literature relating to the impact of key merger variables upon the merger process. There appears to be limited empirical evidence to support these assumptions. In particular, I will test the assumption that single sector collaborations and mergers are easier to manage and that merging institutions with complementary missions and academic profiles is more straightforward (Harman & Robertson Cuninghame, 1995; Eastman and Lang (2001). I will also test the assumption that two partner mergers are generally easier to manage than multi-partner mergers (Harman & Harman, 2002; Kyvik & Stensaker, 2013).

My review of the existing literature identified some clear gaps in theoretical knowledge regarding the merger process itself. Research to date has focused primarily on what factors led to the successful implementation of an agreement to merge. The literature, with the primary exception of Brown et al (2004), has not focused in a significant manner on what happens during the actual merger process itself, during which crucial decisions about partner choice, vision and mission, due diligence arrangements and engagement with both internal and external stakeholders take place. This phase, which sets the foundations for the actual merger, is neglected in the HE literature. Brown et al (2004, p.2) found that there is “not a great deal of information in the literature about process.” My study aims to make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge available regarding this crucial stage of proceedings. Indeed, much of the research conducted on HE mergers to date has taken place retrospectively (often five to ten years after the merger has taken place). This means that data gathered by researchers, particularly interview data, may not be as reliable as if the data was collected while the process was ongoing. Participants may find it difficult to recall the details and elements of positive or negative memory recollection may have influenced their account of their experiences. Also, staff members who were involved in the merger process may have left the institution or retired since the merger took place, and this could limit access to key participants at the data collection stage. My research will take place concurrently with the process itself, which will give a real and contemporaneous insight into the dynamics and stages of the merger processes in HE.

Finally, my research aims to make a theoretical contribution regarding the potential impact of additional factors, not yet explored in the literature, on the merger process. In particular, the importance of maintaining momentum and stability throughout the process, and the key roles which external change agents and government/government agencies/national legislators can play in the process, have not been explored to any significant extent in the literature. My research aims make a contribution by theorising and examining the impact of these factors upon HE mergers. Additionally, while the literature on HE mergers has identified trust and understanding as a key success factor, there is little data to evidence how it is established or eroded in HE mergers. My research aims to make a contribution in this regard, providing empirical data on the key role of trust in HE mergers. Finally, my research aims to make a theoretical contribution to the macro and micro-political dimensions of HE mergers, which to date have been largely neglected by the literature.

In terms of a geographical contribution, my research will contribute in a significant way to our knowledge of HE mergers in the Irish context. At present, there is a complete absence of literature on HE mergers in the Irish HE sector, which due to its particular history, legislative and regulatory framework, structure, culture and wider environmental conditions, warrants investigation. My research aims to identify the facilitatory, inhibitory and success factors which are relevant and/or particular to the Irish context. In this sense, my research will make a practical contribution by providing guidance for governments, policy makers and legislators on what system level factors can facilitate or inhibit merger processes, thus contributing towards the achievement of national policy objectives. It will also provide guidance to HEIs themselves, who will no doubt come under increasing pressure to merge in near future, on what institutional level factors can contribute towards a successful merger process.

To address the gaps in our knowledge identified above, I have expressed my core research question as “what are the key factors which facilitate on one hand, or inhibit on the other the merger process in the Irish IoT sector?” My sub-questions, described below, are aligned with my literature review and the gaps identified therein.

1. What do management in Irish IoTs perceive to be the main facilitators of the merger process?
2. What do management in Irish IoTs perceive to be the main inhibitors of the merger process?

3. Do any of these factors differ from those identified in the literature as being facilitatory or inhibitory factors for HE mergers, and if so, what were the particular features of the Irish context that led to these differences?
4. What are the micro-political/policy phases through which the proposed mergers may proceed?
5. What critical success factors for HE mergers can be identified from these cases?

These research questions will frame the remainder of my study and will particularly guide my research design, data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 below sets out the methods and methodologies I have employed in seeking answers to these questions.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN - METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

When planning an empirical study, there are a number of alternative approaches which the researcher may adopt. The design, construction and execution of the research by the researcher will be dependent upon and determined by the epistemological and ontological stance of the researcher, the nature and aims of the study and the research questions themselves. This Chapter sets out my research philosophy and approach in detail, explaining the methods and methodologies which will be employed, and explaining how the theoretical framework I developed in Chapter 3 will be employed to enable me to address my research questions.

4.2 Research Philosophy - Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

Historically, the dominant research paradigm was positivism, which asserted that reality is independent of us as humans and that the goal is the discovery of theories based on objective, positive data which is verifiable. However, in recent decades, the emergence of social science as an academic discipline has seen the development of a second research paradigm (Kuhn, 1962), known as interpretivism. I have adopted the interpretivist position, which argues that the study of the social world differs from the study of the physical or natural world, and consequently requires “a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order” (Bryman, 2008, p.15).

Interpretivism recognises that there is a fundamental distinction to be drawn between natural sciences on the one hand, and social sciences on the other, a distinction based on the fact that humans act on the basis of meanings they attribute to their acts and the acts of others. An interpretivist position focuses on the understanding of human and organisational actions in order to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects (Weber, 1946). It acknowledges that it is not possible to separate people from the social contexts in which they exist and that their perceptions of their own actions are key to understanding and explaining people themselves. This approach has influenced the nature of my proposed research study, which seeks to identify and understand what IoTs perceive as being facilitatory and inhibitory factors during the merger process.

From an ontological perspective, I have adopted a constructivist stance. Constructivism focuses on socially and historically negotiated subjective experiences of individuals, with research in this area often addressing the process of interaction amongst individuals or organisations, the historical and cultural settings of the participants and the contexts or environments within which they operate (Creswell, 2014, p.8). Constructivist ideas have been heavily influenced by academics such as Mannheim et al (1967), Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Crotty (1998). My research considers that social entities, organisations and cultures are not objective entities, but rather are constructed from the perceptions and actions of social actors. It focuses on the subjective experiences of the organisations, the people who work within them and the subjective meanings of their actions. My research focuses on the generation or induction of a theory, rather than starting with a theory or proposition. Researchers that ascribe to constructivist ontology recognise that their own backgrounds and experiences shape their interpretation of data, and acknowledge this in their research. They attempt to interpret or make sense of the meanings others have about the world.

Such a stance is most often associated with qualitative research, which is the approach I have adopted for this research, as it is the approach most consistent with my philosophical position and is best aligned to the research questions. Crotty (1998) identified a number of assumptions which apply to constructivist research. He stated that that qualitative researchers seek to understand context or setting of the research through visiting this context and gathering information personally; they tend to use open ended questions so that participants have the opportunity to share their views; they interpret what they find, shaped by their own experiences and background; and they generate meaning in an inductive fashion from the data collected in the field from interaction with a human community. All of the above assumptions are applicable to my research and have shaped proposed my research approach and strategy as outlined below. Creswell (1994) also identified the main assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm, and these are summarised and adapted to my research in the Table 10 below.

Table 10: Influence of Philosophical Assumptions on Research Design (Adapted from Creswell, 1994)

| Philosophical Assumption | Interpretivism | Impact on my Proposed Research Design |
|---|---|--|
| Ontological Assumption (the nature of reality) | Social Constructivism - reality is subjective and multiple as seen by participants | Qualitative approach to research adopted, focusing on understanding and explaining a phenomena within a particular context |
| Epistemological Assumption (what constitutes valid knowledge) | Researcher interacts with that being researched | Conduct interviews and site visits to ensure necessary degree of interaction |
| Axiological Assumption (the role of values) | Researcher acknowledges that research is value laden and biases are present | Research beliefs and biases will be specifically acknowledged and an appropriate degree of reflexivity shown in my research |
| Rhetorical Assumption (the language of research) | Researcher writes in an informal style and uses the personal voice, accepted qualitative terms and limited definitions | Personal voice and accepted qualitative terms will be used |
| Methodological Assumption (the process of research) | Inductive process Study of mutual simultaneous shaping factors with an emerging design (categories or themes identified during the process) Research is context bound Patterns/theories developed for understanding Findings are accurate and reliable through verification | Inductive approach to theory generation adopted Themes identified during data analysis process Theory aims to explain the phenomena Case study approach selected – bounds the context Reliability through verification of data collected – will ensure accurate record keeping |

4.3 Research Approach & Strategy – Case Study Approach

As my research is investigating mergers as a contemporary, ongoing and dynamic phenomenon in the Irish HE sector; that the contextual conditions are highly relevant to understanding what is actually happening; and that as a researcher I have little control over behavioural events, I considered a case study approach to be the most appropriate methodology to employ for my research.

Case study research has become increasingly recognised as a valuable research method in recent decades (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014) a case study approach to research is the preferred method, compared to others, when the main research questions are how or why questions; the researcher has little control over behavioural events; and the focus of the research is an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the contextual conditions are highly pertinent to the phenomenon of study. Creswell (2014) opines that a case study is a methodology in which the researcher explores a real life, contemporary bounded system (the case) or multiple bounded systems (the cases) over time, through detailed, in depth data collection involving a variety of sources of information such as observations, documents and reports, interviews, etc. The researcher then reports a case description on each of the cases selected and identifies case themes from the data collected to answer the research question.

Yin (2014) states that case studies may be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. He also states that there are four applications of the case study; to explain, to describe, to illustrate and to enlighten – the most important is to explain the presumed causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies (Yin 2014). My research will focus on both describing and explaining a contemporary phenomenon and so can be classified as a descriptive and/or explanatory case study. When designing case study research, Yin (2014) sets out a four stage process to be followed by the researcher. This is the approach to case study design which I will adopt for this research. Firstly, Yin (2014) states you must identify the case(s) or unit(s) of analysis to be studied, as well as set some limits or bounds to the case. At an early stage, I identified that the cases to be studied would be the three Alliances of IoTs preparing to merge with the intent of achieving TU status. Secondly, Yin (2014) recommends the development of a theoretical framework at an early stage to guide the research. Through my literature review, I identified a theoretical framework (discussed in Chapter 3), to guide the anticipated case study and in particular, the data collection process. Thirdly, Yin (2014)

advocates the adoption of a planned case study design. I will present and explain my planned design below. Finally, Yin (2014) recommends testing the proposed design against the four key criteria for maintaining the quality of a case study. Again, I address this issue below.

4.4 Research Cases, Setting and Sample

Case study research may focus on a single case (a within-site study) or multiple cases (a multi-site or collective study). In a multi-site or collective study, the researcher selects one issue or concern and selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2014). Yin (2014, p.26) argues that most multiple case study designs are likely to be stronger than single case study designs. He argues that multiple case studies should employ the logic of replication, rather than sampling logic. Replication logic occurs where each case selected either predicts similar results or predicts contrasting results for anticipatable reasons. The researcher replicates the procedures for each case, makes comparisons and draws distinctions between the various cases (Yin, 2014, p.57).

My research will be a collective or multiple case study, consisting of three cases; three Alliances of IoTs which are undergoing the merger process. These cases were chosen to allow me gather different perspectives on the issue in question and demonstrate and explain differences across cases. I will employ literal replication logic, where the cases selected, although at varying stages of the merger process, should elicit reasonably similar results, with one exception, where I would anticipate contrasting results. The three cases I have selected as the subject matter of this research are identified in the table below.

Table 11: Cases Selected for Study

| Case | Composition | Merger Progress to Date |
|-------------|--------------------|---|
| Alliance A | Two existing IoTs | Successfully undergone stages one, two and three of the process but have not yet merged or completed stage four of the re-designation process. |
| Alliance B | Two existing IoTs | Successfully completed stage one of the process but failed to submit a stage two application. One of the partners unilaterally suspended all merger activities and withdrew |

| | | |
|------------|---------------------|---|
| | | from the process. The partners have since undergone a facilitation process to attempt to get the process back on track. |
| Alliance C | Three existing IoTs | Successfully undergone stages one, two and three of the process but have yet to merge or complete stage four of the re-designation process. |

I chose these three cases for a number of reasons. Firstly, because at the date of commencement of this research project, they represented the totality of merger activity in the sector and allowed an accurate picture of activity in the sector to emerge; secondly, because each case varies significantly in terms of progress made to date vis-à-vis all the four step merger and re-designation process, as prescribed by *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*, it will allow me compare and contrast the data gathered from the cases to explain those variations; and thirdly, because I work in one of the IoTs which is proposing to merge, the examination of the other two cases allows me provide a more objective assessment of the factors which are impacting either positively or negatively upon the process.

4.5 Methods of Data Collection

4.5.1 Introduction

Case studies generally involve the collection of data from multiple sources in order to develop in depth understanding (Creswell, 2012). Yin (2014) claims that as case studies typically rely on multiple sources of evidence, a variety of distinct methods of data collection are required when conducting case study research. Creswell (2012) notes that case study research is typically extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, documents and audio-visual materials. For this reason, I plan on utilising a number of data collection methods. The primary methods of data collection which will be pursued in this research are in-depth, semi structured interviews along with external and internal document analysis. The table below outlines the methods of data collection to be used across the cases.

Table 12: Schedule of Data Collection Methods

| Method | Indicative Data | Case A | Case B | Case C |
|----------------------------|--|--------|--------|--------|
| External Document Analysis | <i>Programme for Government 2011-2016</i> <i>National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030</i> <i>Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape, 2012</i> <i>Completing the Landscape Process for Irish Higher Education 2013</i> <i>Report to the Minister for Education and Skills on System Reconfiguration, Inter-Institutional Collaboration and System Governance in Irish Higher Education, 2013</i> <i>General Scheme of Technological Universities Bill, 2014</i> | X | X | X |
| Internal Document Analysis | Stage 1 ‘Expression of Interest’ Submission Documents Stage 2 ‘Business Plan’ Submission Documentation Minutes of meetings, reports, charts, presentations, e-mail and other correspondence | X | X | X |
| Audio & Visual Materials | Newspaper Reports Online Discussion Fora/Blogs Radio Interviews Websites of participating Institutions | X | X | X |
| Interviews | In-Depth, ‘Elite’ Semi-Structured interviews focusing on key members of the Alliances | X | X | X |

4.5.2 Internal and External Document Analysis

Documentary analysis has the advantage of being generally an easy to access, unobtrusive method of data collection (Saunders et al, 2009), where the research subjects are not directly involved and issues such as possible altered behaviour of research subjects are eliminated. As identified above, a wide variety of external documentation is available and will be used in this research. Documentation produced by the Government, Government Departments, and the Irish HEA will be analysed. This documentation will provide background and context to the cases and explain the environment within which the research is taking place. As noted earlier, this is particularly important in research which adopts a constructivist stance, and is critical to case study research where context is essential. Internal documentation produced by the Alliances in the form of formal submission documents, charts, presentations, minutes of meetings and correspondence on the proposed mergers and re-designation process will also be gathered. This documentation will assist me in understanding and explaining how the merger process is being managed by the Alliances.

4.5.3 Audio & Visual Materials

I gathered and analysed newspaper reports and online blogs/discussion fora on the merger and re-designation process and proposals, which contained a large amount of data and opinion on the subject matter of my research. Some of the blogs and discussion fora were particularly useful, as they allowed participants and stakeholders in the process freely express their views in an anonymous manner, without fear of ramification or identification. In addition, radio interviews on the merger and re-designation process were also analysed. This material was be used to provide background and context to the cases.

4.5.4 In-Depth, 'Elite' Semi-Structured Interviews

Yin (2012) opines that interviews are a particularly valuable source of evidence for case studies, as they can offer richer and more extensive material than data gathered from surveys. A key part of my data collection involved a number of 'elite' semi-structured interviews with key members of the three Alliances. The purpose of these interviews was to use conversation, discussion and questioning to provide insight into both the merger process itself and their involvement in that process, and to draw information from the participants on the key areas emerging from the theoretical framework identified in the literature review. Interviews were carefully planned and executed in order to provide bias-free, reliable and valid data.

Semi-structured or open ended interviews can provide illustration of the participant's true feelings on an issue (Chisnall, 1992). They are also particularly suited to the nature of this research project, and align closely to my philosophical research position. Semi-structured interviews have a fluid and flexible structure, are usually organised around an aide memoire or interview guide. This contains topics, themes, or areas to be covered during the course of the interview, rather than a sequenced script of standardised questions (Lewis-Beck et al, 2004). In preparation for the interviews, I prepared an interview guide, loosely structured around the conceptual framework identified in the literature review, but flexible enough to allow the interviewees to guide the direction of the interview. Too strict an adherence to an interview guide may have the effect of stifling the emergence of new data and theory.

Once the interview guide prepared, I pre-tested it with two participants to ensure that the participants and I share the same understanding of the questions posed and to ensure fluidity (Yates, 2004). Following this 'pilot', some questions were amended and some new questions added to the interview schedule.

The issue of who to include in the sample of interviewees is a critical decision. Yin (2012, p.12) notes that insights gain further value "if the participants are key persons in the organisations, communities or small groups being studied, not just the average member of such group". These 'key persons' or 'opinion formers' can offer extremely valuable insights to a researcher, beyond what others in the organisation can provide. This is particularly the case when looking at organisational behaviour, motivation and response to external pressures.

Therefore, interviewees who were heavily involved in the merger process in each of the Alliances were chosen. In order to gain differing perspectives from the different actors in the process, I ensured that a mixture of Presidents, Project Steering/Implementation Group Chairs, Senior Executives, Internal and External Change Agents and Project Managers were interviewed. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their senior and influential role in the planning/leading/managing of the merger process. It is assumed that they had the requisite level of knowledge and opinion to inform the findings of my study. The interviewees were drawn from each the IoTs which constitute the Alliances to ensure representation from each of the individual IoT. In addition, to gain a system level perspective on the merger process, I interviewed two representatives from the HEA to garner their views. The table below outlines the selection of interviewees

Table 13: Selection of Interviewees

| Case | Organisation | Interviewees |
|------------|----------------------------|---|
| Alliance A | IoT1 | 2 Senior Members of Project Steering Group |
| | IoT2 | 2 Senior Members of Project Steering Group |
| | Independent | 1 External Change Agent/Chair |
| Alliance B | IoT1 | 3 Senior Members of Project Steering Group |
| | IoT2 | 3 Senior Members of Project Steering Group |
| | Independent | 1 External Change Agent/Chair |
| Alliance C | IoT1 | 1 Senior Member of Project Steering Group |
| | IoT2 | 1 Senior Member of Project Steering Group |
| | IoT3 | 1 Senior Member of Project Steering Group |
| | Independent | 1 External Change Agent/Chair |
| All Cases | Higher Education Authority | 2 Members of the Higher Education Authority – 1 from the Executive, 1 from the Board. |

The interviews were conducted over a three month period, from November 2015 to January 2016. Due to the sensitivity and the ongoing nature of the subject matter of my research, it was essential to assure the interviewees from the outset of the voluntary, confidential and anonymous nature of the interviews. All interviewees were assured that they would not be named or in any other way identifiable or associated with any institution in my research. Additionally, because of my role in one of the IoTs involved in the merger process, it was essential to establish trust of the interviewees so that they could offer free opinions in spite of the author being an ‘insider researcher’ for one of the cases. Interviewees were all contacted in writing in advance of the interview and asked for their consent to engage in the interview and record the data. The interview guide in Appendix 1 was used during the interviews and was also emailed to participants in advance of the interview so they could prepare answers if they wished, or veto any questions they did not wish to answer.

Interviews took place on site and each interview lasted for approximately 60 to 90 minutes in duration. Interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed as promptly as possible into a full record of the interview for research purposes. I also made notes during

the interview to record data on the interviewee's expressions, emotions, body language, etc. Although I had anticipated that some interviewees may prefer not to have the interview recorded, this issue did not arise. Interviewees were assured that the full verbatim transcripts would not be published in my thesis. However, they were asked to confirm if they consent to anonymised verbatim extracts being quoted by me in the findings.

Because the interviewees are members of their organisations executive team, and all hold more senior positions than I, there was no potential for coercion (Mercer, 2007). However, as I was interviewing more senior staff, a power imbalance naturally arose, and it is possible that some responses to my questions may be biased because, perhaps, senior management want to portray a more positive view of the process than may be the case. In order to minimise the potential effect of this, I will consider validity testing of responses throughout the research process and when analysing results.

4.6 Data Analysis

Creswell (2012, p.100) opines that when analysing data collected during case study research, it is possible to engage in a holistic analysis of the entire case, and/or an embedded analysis of a specific aspect of the case. I chose to conduct a holistic analysis of the data, focusing on the entire case as the unit of analysis. Given that research conducted in this area to date is of a holistic nature, and that many of the issues likely to arise are interlinked, I chose this as the most appropriate method to adopt.

Stake (1995) recommends that when analysing case study data, the researcher should firstly to provide a detailed description of the case such as the history, chronology of events and activities, etc., and secondly focus on the key themes or issues which arise from the case. Creswell (2012, p.101) provides that a typical format in multi-case research is for the researcher to provide a detailed description of each case and themes within the case (known as a within case analysis) and then to provide a thematic analysis across the cases (a cross case analysis). This is the manner in which I will present the findings from this research.

For each case selected, I will provide a within case description (see Appendix 2 - Within Case Description Outline) and analysis of key or unique themes. This will be followed by a cross case analysis of the data, along with an interpretation of the cases and/or assertions in respect of my findings. The process will be inductive, rather than deductive, in line with my philosophical position.

As stated above, I will analyse the data gathered on both on a within and cross case basis. Given my philosophical position and assumptions outlined above, I acknowledge that the interpretation of my data naturally involves the exercise of a degree of judgement on my part in relation to the themes and issues under review. The theoretical framework identified in the literature review was used as an initial guide around which themes will be developed. However, it should not and did not serve to limit the generation of additional themes which emerge from the data.

It is critical that qualitative research is systematic in its approach to data collection and analysis. The semi-structured, open ended interviews conducted allowed participants to freely articulate their perceptions and experiences. In analysing the data from the 18 interviewees, responses were grouped thematically and categories of meaning and relationships between categories were derived from the data itself through a process of inductive reasoning, known as coding. This was done with reference to the conceptual frameworks identified by the literature and the research questions posed in the study. Responses were not grouped according to pre-defined categories or questions. This thematic analysis approach offers the means whereby by the researcher can analyse articulated perspectives of interviewees so that they may be integrated in a model that seeks to explain the social processes under study.

Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) define thematic analysis as “a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.” Thematic analysis, they state, aids the interpretation of various aspects of the research topic. In the context of this research, I adopted the six step approach to thematic analysis advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved searching for themes or patterns across a data set (i.e. documents, reports and interview), rather than *within* a data item, (e.g. an individual document). According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) a “theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set”. The six steps are outlined in the diagram below.

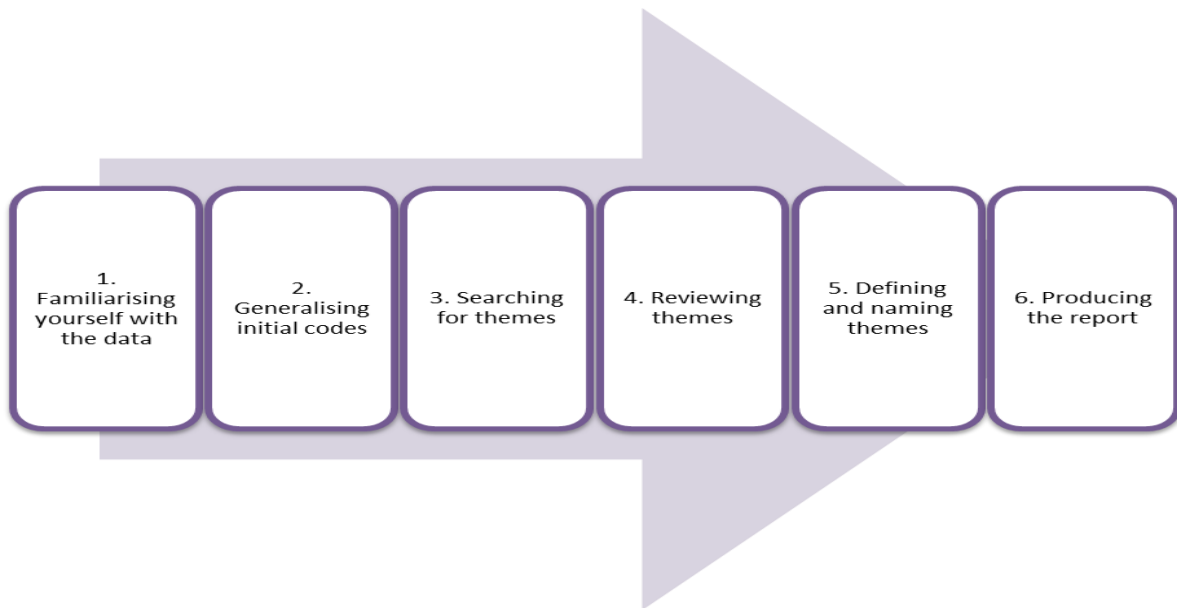


Figure 8: Braun & Clark's Six Step Process for Thematic Analysis (2006)

In order to assist with this process, 'NVivo 11' qualitative data analysis software was used. This software was used as to organise and manage the large volume of data which was acquired over the course of the study. NVivo was used as a tool of efficiency, and is not a tool which in and of itself conducts analysis and draws conclusions. As Fielding and Lee (1998, p.167) explain, qualitative researchers "want tools which support analysis, but leave the analyst firmly in charge". Another key advantage of NVivo software is that it serves as a tool of transparency and provides an audit trail to demonstrate the steps taken during the data analysis stage, and to provide confidence in relation to validity and reliability of the research in question. By logging data movements and coding patterns, and the mapping of conceptual categories and thought progression, all stages of the analytical process become traceable and transparent, facilitating the researcher in producing a more detailed and comprehensive audit trail than manual mapping of this complicated process can allow, particularly when dealing with a large data set. The cycles of analysis used in my study are presented below. While they are presented as discrete phases, the practical application was more iterative in nature than this suggests.

Phase 1: This involved transcribing all 18 interviews, reading and re-reading the interview data, and noting down initial ideas, concepts and frameworks to familiarise

myself thoroughly with the data. This took place simultaneously with the data collection phase from November to February to 2016. Please refer to Appendix 3 for evidence of initial ideas and concepts generated at this stage of the data analysis. Once this was completed, the interview transcripts and related filed notes and observations were uploaded into NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 11, 2015).

Phase 2: This phase involved open coding to generate initial codes in the data in an inductive manner. This involved broad participant driven open coding of the interview transcripts supported with definitions so as to deconstruct the data from its original chronology into initial non-hierarchical codes. This phase of data analysis took place in March 2016, and resulted in the generation of 53 initial codes (See Appendix 4). These 53 codes were allocated clear titles and definitions to serve as rules for inclusion (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Phase 3: This phase involved re-ordering and categorising the initial codes by grouping related codes and reconstructing the data by organising the open codes into a framework that made sense to further the analysis for this particular study. This phase also included distilling, re-labelling and merging similar codes generated in phase 1 to ensure that titles and rules for inclusion accurately reflected coded content. This resulted in the initial 53 codes being categorised into 5 key overarching themes, linked to and inspired by theories derived from the literature review and from the initial phase 1 coding (See Appendix 5). This phase took place in April 2016.

Phase 4: This phase involved ‘coding on’ – that is breaking down the now restructured categories into sub-categories to offer more in depth understanding of the highly qualitative aspects under scrutiny. This allowed for the emergence of divergent views, negative cases, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours coded to these categories and provided clearer insights into the meanings embedded therein. This phase took place in May and June 2016. (See Appendix 6 for examples of coding on in the project).

Phase 5: This phase involved data reduction - consolidating codes from all four phases to date into more abstract, philosophical and literature based themes to create a final framework of themes and explore their inter-relatedness for reporting purposes. The initial framework of 5 key overarching themes identified in Phase 2 was further explored and tested, and selected as the most appropriate framework around which the complex range of themes identified would be structured and presented. This phase took place in June 2016 (See Appendix 7).

Phase 6 – the final phase involved writing *analytical memos* against the higher level themes to accurately summarise the content of each category, propose empirical findings against such categories and synthesise these into individual case study reports and finally, a cross case report. This phase took place from June 2016 to September 2016 and forms the basis for my findings in Chapters 5 and 6.

Figure 9 below, adapted from Yin's multiple case study procedure (2014) summarises the case study protocol which I adopted.

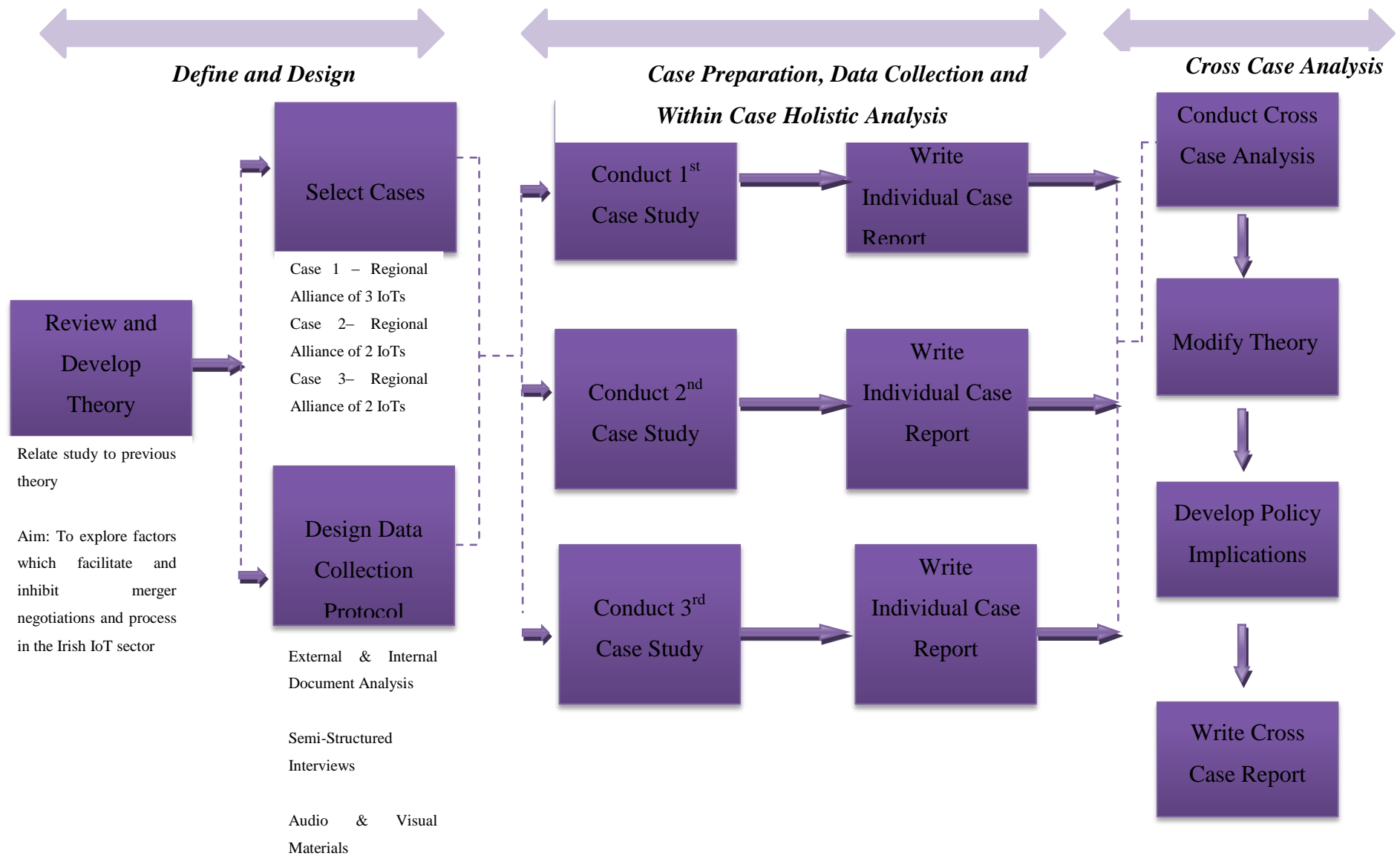


Figure 9: Planned Case Study Protocol (Adapted from Yin, 2014)

4.7 Role of Researcher & Reflexivity

I currently hold a management post in one of the IoTs which forms part of one the Alliances under investigation. In my role, I regularly attend management meetings and briefings on the merger process within my own institution and I was a member of the group which prepared the stage one submission for our Alliance. As a result I have first-hand experience of the people, process and dynamics involved in that particular case and so will necessarily bring that knowledge, along with my own assumptions and beliefs to the research.

As I am effectively an ‘insider researcher’ (Costley et al, 2010) in respect of one particular case, I must consider the complexities which may arise as a result of my dual role of manager and researcher. Being an ‘insider researcher’ often brings with it an enhanced sense of trust and responsibility which I must recognise. Raelin (2008) recommends that the ‘insider’ should develop a sense of self reflection and gain a realisation that the project being undertaken is likely to have worth to the organisation and/or the professional field of the researcher. Indeed, there is a growing body of evidence proposing that work based research projects may prove beneficial to the long term success of organisations (Raelin, 2008). The research which I am conducting will be of benefit to my own organisation and others in the sector who plan on merging in the future. I am cognisant of the fact that I have a responsibility to ensure that my research can contribute in a meaningful way to the success of future merger efforts in the sector.

Because of my dual role as researcher and manager, some of the interviewees may have been wary of fully disclosing their real opinions about the merger process to me. Therefore it was particularly important for me to establish the trust of the interviewees so that they could offer free and honest opinions in spite of me being an ‘insider researcher’.

Power relationships are also an important consideration for me in this context. Given that all of the interviewees will hold more senior positions than I, there is no real potential for coercion on my part (Mercer, 2007).

4.8 Validity and Reliability

Although case study research is now a well-recognised form of empirical enquiry in social science, education and business research, some researchers traditionally viewed case studies as lacking rigour and objectivity (Rowley, 2002, p.16). Therefore, it is particularly important to address concerns about validity and reliability when designing a

case study and to test the proposed design in relation to the ‘quality’ hallmarks commonly used in social science research – construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. Threats to validity can occur during data collection, data analysis and data interpretation stages of the research project and the researcher must be careful to identify these threats and plan to overcome them to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, conformability and data dependability.

The first of these ‘quality’ hallmarks involves construct validity, which involves identifying correct operational measures for the concept being studied to ensure that the study measures what it is supposed to measure and that there is sufficient objectivity in the study (Yin, 2014). This can be particularly challenging in case study research and Yin (2014) suggests that three tactics can be employed to increase construct validity when doing case studies. Firstly, the researcher should use multiple sources of evidence during the data collection phase to encourage convergent lines of enquiry. Secondly, the researcher should establish a chain of evidence during the data collection phase. Thirdly, the draft case study report should be reviewed by key informants. Additionally, to further ensure construct validity, the constructs for the case study should be developed through a literature review. I have employed all of these tactics during my study to ensure construct validity.

The second test of quality concerns internal validity, which is mainly a concern for explanatory case studies, where the researcher is attempting to attribute causation between two factors, i.e., event x led to y. My research is not primarily concerned with the causal relationships of independent and dependent variables but rather is focused on ‘generative mechanisms’ (Guba & Lincoln 1995), i.e. establishing a phenomenon in a credible manner. In case study research, internal validity and credibility can be established by the use of case analysis, cross case analysis, pattern matching, assurance of internal coherence of findings, expert peer review, and the development of diagrams, illustration and data matrices to demonstrate the internal consistency of the information collected. I have used case and cross case analysis, expert peer review and the development of diagrams, illustrations and data matrices to ensure the internal validity of the data collected.

The third test concerns external validity and the extent to which a study’s findings are generalisable beyond the scope of that particular study. Generalisability has been defined as “the extent to which you can come to conclusions about one thing based on information about another” (Vogt, 1993, p.99). One of the main criticisms of case study

research is that is not generalisable across a population. However, when choosing a research design, it is always necessary to acknowledge and accept that whatever design you choose will necessarily have a limitation and the researcher should be mindful of the conflicting desiderata of generalisability, precision and realism when adopting a particular research strategy. By choosing to undertake case study research, I acknowledge that while my design has the advantage of offering precision in control and measurement of behaviours of interests and realism of the context in which behaviours are observed, it is not widely generalisable outside of its context. Indeed, the crucial question, according to Bryman and Bell (2003, p.56) is not ‘whether the findings can be generalised to a wider universe, but how well the researcher generates theory out of the findings’. Therefore my focus in this study will be on generating theory from my findings on the cases which will generate local knowledge related to the particular context within which the cases are bound, rather than attempting to generalise those findings. Yin (2014) proposes a number of tactics to enhance external validity in case study research and in particular, recommends that replication logic be used in multiple case studies. I have incorporated this recommendation into my research design.

The final quality hallmark is reliability, which is primarily concerned with minimising errors and biases in a study. It aims to ensure that if a later researcher follows the same procedures and conducts the case study all over again, the same findings and conclusions would be reached. At first glance, this does not appear to sit easily with the social constructivist position I have adopted in my research, which acknowledges that my role in one of the organisations being studied may influence the outcomes, findings and conclusions which I might draw from the study. However, in a constructivist study such as this, reliability is achieved primarily through the verification of data collected. Consequently it is essential that I keep accurate records of the data I collect and that my data is collected, analysed and stored systematically. To this end, during my research, I developed and maintained a database for each case, and followed systematic data collection and analysis protocols as outlined above. Yin (2014, p. 25) suggests that using a case study protocol also ensures reliability, and I have developed and described this protocol above. The table below indicates the quality hallmarks I have built into my proposed research design.

Table 14: Tactics Employed to ensure Validity & Reliability - Adapted from Yin, 2014

| Test | Tactic Employed | Phase of Research |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Construct Validity | Develop constructs for case study through literature review Use multiple sources of evidence Establish chain of evidence | Literature Review Data Collection Data Collection |
| Internal Validity | Case and cross case analysis Expert peer review Diagrams, illustrations and data matrices | Data Analysis Writing Up Writing Up |
| External Validity | Use replication logic in multiple case studies | Research Design |
| Reliability | Develop case study database Use case study protocol | Data Collection Data Collection |

4.9 Ethical Considerations & Access to Data

Ethical issues may arise at all stages of the research process, and these must be anticipated by the researcher (Berg, 2001; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011; Punch, 2005; Sieber, 1998). Various codes of ethics for research have been developed over the years to guide and ensure ethical research practice. My research follows the ‘*Framework for Research Ethics*’ (2012) introduced by the Economics and Social Research Council (hereinafter referred to as the ESRC). This code establishes six key principles of research ethics which guide my research. These principles have been set out below, along with the steps I took to ensure all ethical issues are addressed in my research. In addition, before the planned research commenced, ethical approval was sought and secured from the University of Bath in line with its approved research ethics policies and procedure.

The first principle in the ESRC code provides that research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity, quality and transparency. These principles underpin my research project from inception to conclusion. While conducting my research, I acted with integrity and honesty at all times. I have given credit to the work of others and been open and honest with participants in the study. When reporting findings, I ensured

that I reported multiple perspectives and contrary findings. I have also assigned credit to other academics whose work I cited and referenced during my study.

The ESRC code requires that staff and participants must take part voluntarily, free from any coercion and should normally be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved. Before conducting my research, I ensured that I had gone through local approvals, as required, in the different institutions which form part of my research. Once possible interviewees were identified, all were contacted and informed in writing about the general nature and purpose of the study, the methods I intended to use, any risks involved and intended possible uses of my research. This was done in accordance with the substantive provisions of the Data Protection Acts 1998-2003. Following the provision of the above information, I asked all participants if they consented voluntarily to participate in the study and asked them to sign a consent form to that effect. As I noted earlier, there is no possibility for coercion in my own institution as the participants will all hold more senior posts than I. In the other institutions, I ensured that the participants were acting freely. The issue of capacity to consent does not arise in my research proposal.

Confidentiality of data supplied by research participants must be maintained and anonymity of respondents must be protected. Participants were be assured of anonymity and confidentiality and data collected from participants was and is stored in a safe and secure manner (double password protected) to ensure confidentiality. To protect anonymity, individual alliances, institutions and participants are anonymised in my thesis. Although I have anonymised the three Alliances, it may be possible for an informed reader to identify them from certain features of the case. However, I have at all times ensured that individual anonymity within those alliances is ensured and protected, and that no interviewee will be identifiable either individually or in association with any particular institution. Once my research is completed and the data is no longer required for the purposes of any associated examination, the data will be destroyed, again in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1998-2003.

The final principles of the ESRC require that harm to research participants must be avoided in all instances and that the independence of research must be made clear and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit. I have ensured that my research has made clear the independent nature of the study and specifically acknowledged any possible conflicts of interests (see section 3.7 on 'Role of Researcher' above).

4.10 Methodological Assumptions

I have made a number of methodological assumptions. Firstly, I assume that cases selected are appropriate relative to the research questions. Secondly, I assume that documentary and other evidence which was gathered is accurate. Thirdly, I assume that the open-ended questions used in the semi-structured interviews are appropriate relative to the research questions. Fourthly, I assume that the interviewees have answered the questions honestly. Finally, as the merger process is ongoing and not yet complete I am making assumptions about the link between the perceived facilitatory and inhibitory factors and the likely success of or outcome for the Alliance, particularly in research question 5.

4.11 Methodological Limitations

There are a number of limitations to my research design. Firstly, my use of a case study approach may raise issues in relation to external validity and means that caution should be exercised when generalising based on the results outside of the particular context of the study (Bryman and Bell 2003). Secondly, due to the fact that I have selected three cases, the depth of overall analysis possible in any one case was necessarily diluted. The selection of one case would have allowed greater depth, but would have limited my ability to compare and contrast findings across the cases and indeed the sector. Thirdly, due to the relatively short time period within which the research was conducted and the fact that the research was carried out by me individually, it was not possible to conduct a large number of interviews. Consequently the data gathered from the interviews I conducted with management in the various Alliances may not be representative of all members of the organisations under investigation. If time and resources allowed, a larger number of interviews would be conducted which would perhaps be more representative of the organisations. A fourth limitation is the fact that as the merger and re-designation process is on-going, it is a sensitive subject and participants may not speak as freely as they would if the process was completed. In addition, flux and change in the sector is occurring as the research is being conducted, which might mean that emerging factors impacting upon the process have not been captured in the interview data. Additionally, it is not possible to assert that the factors perceived by management in the Alliances are definitively facilitatory or inhibitory, as no Alliance has reached a final outcome. In regard to one of the Alliances, there has been also a high degree of friction between the partners regarding the merger process, which may result in a more negative view being offered by the

interviewees than would otherwise be the case. A final limitation is that as I hold a management post in one of the IoTs which forms part of one the Alliances under investigation, I am effectively an ‘insider researcher’ (Costley et al, 2010) in respect of that particular case. As a result, the interviewees may have been wary of fully disclosing their real opinions about the merger process.

4.12 Summary

This Chapter has presented the research approach and design that I have adopted when gathering and analysing my data, and has reflected upon the strengths and limitations of my design, along with ethical considerations and methodological assumptions and limitations. I will further reflect upon and evaluate my experience in implementing my chosen research design in Chapter 7 – Conclusions & Recommendations. The next two chapters present the findings of my study, offering firstly a within case analysis providing a detailed description of each case and key themes within that case and secondly, providing a thematic analysis across the cases.

5. WITHIN CASE FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed within-case analysis of each of the three Alliances which form part of my research. The background and context for each merger is discussed, along with details of the progress of the Alliance to date. Findings from the data which identify the particular facilitatory and inhibitory factors which each Alliance has faced/is facing during the merger process are identified and discussed, along with a conclusion on and recommendations for each individual Alliance.

5.2 Alliance A

5.2.1 Introduction

This case study examines the efforts of two regional Irish IoTs to merge and be re-designated as a TU under the process set out by the Irish HEA. The Alliance has been slow to make progress, and almost six years since discussions began, have yet to establish a firm date for merger. This study investigates the factors which are perceived to be impacting upon the merger process in this context, and identifies the key inhibitors which have caused many of the difficulties faced by the partners.

5.2.2 Background & Context

Discussions regarding a potential merger and eventual creation of a TU had their origins in this case as early as 2009, when a tentative Alliance, consisting of three existing IoTs, was formed. After some preliminary discussions, a formal alliance was created and the parties began the process outlined by the HEA. However, one of the purported partners decided to withdraw from the Alliance in December 2012, leaving the other two partners to continue on with the process. The two current partners are briefly described below.

IoT 1 was founded in the early 1970's, and is currently one of Ireland's largest IoTs, with a student and staff community of community of 15,000 approx. It is based in a large city, where another traditional university is situated. It offers a full range of programmes from level six to ten of the NFQ, across a wide range of discipline areas, along with a number of specialist colleges which are located in campuses around the county. It has long espoused ambitions to secure university status, and before the current

configuration, had also been in talks with another large IoT about the possibility of merger and university designation.

IoT 2 is located approximately 120kms away from IoT A, in a relatively small regional town. It is a much smaller institution, consisting of approximately 3000 students and staff. It is currently located over two campuses in the town. Established in the late 1970's, it now offers a broad range of programmes from level six to ten of the NFQ. In recent years it has come under considerable financial pressure and its long term viability, should it not merge, has been questioned. The table below presents the key points of note from Alliance A.

Table 15: Alliance A - Key Points

| Alliance A – Key Points | |
|--|--|
| Number of Partner IoTs | Two |
| Relative Locations | All located within a clearly defined province/region – however the main campuses approximately 120 kms apart, with a journey time of approx. two hours. There are existing universities in the region. |
| Historical Context/Relationship | No real history of collaboration until late 2009. Alliance lost one prospective partner in 2012. |
| Size and Scale | One large and one small partner |
| Academic Programme Offerings | Broadly similar programme profile, with both Institutes offering programmes from level six to ten (Doctoral level) of the NFQ. The larger IoT has a significantly stronger research profile. |
| Ethos/Missions | Broadly similar- both IoTs have strong ties to their local communities and regions, from which most of their students come. |
| Projected combined student numbers (as per published HEA enrolment figures 2014/15) | 14,000 students approx. |

5.2.3 Progress to Date

From 2009 to 2012, this Alliance consisted of three existing IoTs, located within a quite a wide geographical region, stretching to approximately 100 square kilometers and with a population of approximately 900,000 people. This period of time involved extensive discussions between members of the Alliance themselves, and between the Alliance and the HEA with a view to establishing the future higher education landscape. However, in December 2012, (six months after the initial HEA deadline for expressions of interest had expired and two months before this Alliance eventually submitted its expression of interest) one of the purported partners decided to withdraw from the Alliance, blaming a change in the landscape and the lack of policy or political support for the move, citing mixed messages since the publication of the Hunt Report. This withdrawal left the other two partners to continue on with the process, and certainly caused some uncertainty and disruption within the Alliance.

However both remaining partners were clearly motivated by the opportunity for TU designation and the perceived benefits which the university brand brings, particularly the larger partner, which had been seeking university designation for some time. The smaller partner, which was facing financial challenges, was also clearly trying to ensure financial stability and future viability. In early 2013, a mere two months after the third partner withdrew, a submission from the Alliance containing an expression of interest as per Stage 1 of the TU process was made to the HEA. This submission followed on from the original individual submissions of both IoTs in response to the HEA on *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* documents. In May 2013, the HEA published its *Completing the Landscape Process for Irish Higher Education* document in which it acknowledged receipt of the formal expression of interest from the Alliance and indicated that the proposal could proceed to stage two.

The Alliance then began work on Stage two of the process – Preparation of a Business Plan. This involved the preparation of a detailed plan by the Alliance to address how it proposed to meet the criteria for a TU and the process requirements and timelines. Key project governance structures and project managers were put in place to assist with progressing the work associated with the merger, and the services of a number of external consultants and a project chair, to oversee the process, were secured. A very tight working group were tasked with putting together the proposal and the Alliance, at this stage, made a deliberate decision not to cascade work on the merger through the organisation until it got the green light from the HEA and the merger looked more certain. During this phase, a

series of consultations were held with a number of external stakeholder groups including HEIs, enterprises, development authorities and public representatives as well as an ongoing constructive dialogue with the HEA and the Department. Before the submission of the Stage Two Business Plan, the Alliance engaged a peer review panel of international HE experts to review the draft submission in the context of the national and international HE landscape, and incorporated the feedback into its final submission.

Once the Alliance submitted its Business Plan to the HEA, as per Stage Three of the designated process, the plan was subjected to scrutiny and review by an external international expert panel. This review took place in 2014. The Stage Three International Panel found that the Alliance was likely to meet the criteria for designation as a TU within the proposed timeframe, and that it had the capacity to achieve the objectives of consolidation, subject to a number of considerations. The panel commended the Alliance on the substantial work already done and the evident commitment of the partners. However, they noted that they were surprised not to be presented with a more nuanced discussion of the mission of the new institution as appropriate to meet expectations around TU designation and that attention needed to be given to articulating a more profound sense of the characteristics expected of a TU. They stated that the proposed timeframe appeared to be lengthy in comparison with other cases with which they were familiar. They recommended that the Alliance reflect on the proposed timescales, including the disadvantages of moving at such a slow pace. They also recommended that the Alliance reconsider its proposed organisational design for the new institution, being cognisant of the need to provide solutions to the geographical separation of the campuses, and that they continue to work to diversify and develop new income streams. The International Panel report recommended that the Alliance move to the next stage of the merger and TU designation process, and also made a number of recommendations for the Alliance.

However, it appears that this Stage Three International Panel report caused real difficulties. Although the HEA executive commissioned the International Panel, it has been reported that the Board of the HEA were unhappy that the panel had recommended the Alliance for progression. The Minister for Education & Skills allegedly indicated to the Board of the HEA that they would have to accept the International Panel's recommendation, which they did, although subsequently the HEA issued a strongly worded letter to the Alliance setting out the challenges ahead.

Following on from this, the Alliance has, for a variety of reasons, which are discussed below, been unable to make any real progress in addressing the issues raised by

the International Panel Report or by the HEA. While both partners still purport to be committed to the merger, the Alliance has yet to merge, and yet to set any clear date for merger.

5.2.4 Key Factors Impacting upon the Merger & Re-designation Process

The data gathered and analysed has highlighted that the following key issues and factors are perceived as impacting in particular on the progress of Alliance A through the merger and re-designation process. These are summarised in the table below and subsequently discussed in detail.

Table 16: Key Factors Impacting upon Process - Alliance A

| Alliance A – Key Factors | Refs in Interview Data | Number of Sources |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Project Planning, Process & Stages | 61 | 5 |
| Lack of Government, HEA & Department Support, Commitment, Understanding & Clarity | 52 | 5 |
| Uncertainty, Insecurity, Fear & Frustration | 38 | 5 |
| Power Dynamics and Negotiations between Merging Institutions | 36 | 5 |
| Communicating with Staff & IR Issues | 34 | 5 |
| Relationships between Key People | 32 | 5 |
| Role of External Consultants & Facilitators | 26 | 5 |
| Trust, Honesty & Understanding | 24 | 4 |
| Resources | 24 | 4 |
| Building & Maintaining Momentum & Stability | 24 | 4 |

5.2.4.1 Project Planning, Process & Stages

As would be expected, the issue of project planning, merger processes and stages is one which has played a significant role in this Alliance. Interviewees stressed a number of factors which they perceived as particularly relevant.

Firstly, they highlighted the criticality of getting the right project leaders in place, stressing that it is important that these people are chosen for the right reasons and that they are committed to championing the merger project. One interviewee commented:

“It is very important for you to get, let's call them project leaders identified...it is important that those people are not the sort of spare bodies that happen to be hanging around...You actually need somebody who (a) has generated some degree of respect amongst his colleagues, senior and junior (b) They have got to understand something about higher education at least in the Irish context. It would help if they knew something about it in other contexts as well. (c) They have got to understand how organisations operate, both at a formal level and an informal level, and (d) they have actually got to want their merger to occur. And fulfilling all of those criteria is blooming difficult.” (Alliance A, Interviewee 3)

Secondly, interviewees spoke of the difficulty of project planning in the absence of clear timelines, commenting “the difficulty is we don’t have a date for merger” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2). The absence of long overdue enabling legislation has meant that the Alliance has found it very difficult to formulate and implement a project plan. This in turn has given rise to a number of difficulties, including frustration with the process and a loss of momentum, which will be discussed later.

Thirdly, it is clear that the HEA criteria, process & stages for merger and re-designation as a TU have played a critical role in the process. Interviewees in the Alliance spoke of their disagreement with the published criteria, commenting

“we would disagree with a lot of the criteria. The staff quals [qualifications] for example. They drafted it and then found that actually a lot of the traditional universities didn’t meet the criteria, even in terms of percentage of postgrad students and so on. So I think there are a lot of difficulties there” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

Others expressed the view that the criteria

“are not conducive to establishing the type of institutions that you would expect to be the lookout of the IoT sector, which should be very different to universities which are of the older variety. So these are not the traditional types of universities. The very fact that they are calling them technological universities,

rather than universities gives the feeling that these are going to be allowed to be second-class institutions.” (Alliance A, Interviewee 3).

This demonstrates the level of confusion and ambiguity felt by interviewees regarding the process.

While Alliance A went reasonably smoothly through stages one and two of the process, it was stage three, the International Panel Review, which caused major difficulties and appears to have contributed to some of the industrial relations issues now being faced by the Alliance. Interviewees expressed concern that the review was “perfunctory” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2), and conducted “in too much haste” (Alliance A, Interviewee 1), without any site visits to the merging institutions. One commented:

“Definitely I think the process is imperfect. I would have thought site visits, meetings with the executive teams of both organisations, and demanding to meet them, and demanding to meet students and staff would have been appropriate” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).

Interviewees questioned how well briefed the panel were by the HEA, particularly in relation to boundary and operating conditions in the Irish context, commenting

“the degree to which they were given sufficient time to get into their brief probably prevented them from fully understanding the limitations under which we operate e.g. they challenged us about our statement that there would be no compulsory redundancies and no compulsory redeployment. To their eyes, that was madness because it immediately undermined every gain you may get from the merger” (Alliance A, Interviewee 1).

Another commented:

“I think there was a real issue with the panel and their understanding of the Irish context and that was quite obvious” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

That interviewee felt that at this stage the HEA were merely reacting, commenting

“they had given a commitment to responding to the submission within 6 months, and I think they were surprised by how quickly the institutions got that together. They had to establish an international panel in quite short order and the review in the end was a review by the International Panel of our submission and a half day

interview. No visits to any of the institutions or anything like that” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

As discussed above, once the International Panel issued its report, there was some internal wrangling by the HEA, who then issued a covering letter with the report. The reaction from interviewees to the Stage Three process was clearly quite negative, and seems to have generated resentment on the part of some of the interviewees. In relation to the HEA covering letter, one interviewee stated that it

“had a huge number of what seemed to be constraints and conditions and so on attached to it. So we felt there was quite a bit of a level of interference from the HEA in their own process and I’m not sure they have it well defined themselves...I think what the HEA need to be careful to be doing is not to be second guessing processes - you put an International Panel in - they make a recommendation - it then goes to the board of the HEA - to be honest with you, you either empower people to do a job and you take the recommendation or you don’t” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

Interviewees also discussed the fact that the Alliance did not invest significant resources into the merger project until Stage Three was completed. One commented

“we were not going to do anything concrete until after we completed Stage Three. It was only then that the merger was authorised if you want. We took the view that if you did a lot of work before that, either putting in a structure or big interactions or whatever you might get people all worked up for nothing for something that didn’t ever happen. That was the rationale” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

However, this decision appears to have had implications for the Alliance, particularly in terms of communicating with and engaging staff, and there are now hugely significant industrial relations difficulties associated with this merger which have precluded any real progress over the past 12 months.

It is clear, therefore, that there appears to be difficulty and uncertainty in relation to the merger and re-designation criteria and process which is having a considerable impact on the merger process. One interviewee, who has considerable experience of mergers internationally, commented

“there will be an unholy mess...If you want an example of how to develop a national process for doing mergers or for designating institutions, get as far away from Ireland as you possibly can. Because, quite frankly, it is absolute nonsense. We don't even know that is going to be the same panel, so we're not even sure it is going to be the same continuity. We know it is not going to be the same Board. We don't know if it is even going to be the same HEA executive, and there are so many unknowns in the next stage. We can only assume that is the stage that they will get it wrong” (Alliance A, Interviewee 3).

5.3.4.2 Lack of Government, HEA & Department Support, Commitment, Understanding & Clarity

A significant theme which emerges from the data collected centres around a perceived lack of Government, Department and HEA support, commitment, understanding and clarity around the process. The difficulties around process have been highlighted above, but a range of other system level issues have also arisen. These centre around three main areas. Firstly, the failure to enact the legislation necessary for merger; secondly, the perceived failure of HEA to provide funding or facilitation mechanisms for the Alliance; and thirdly, a perceived lack of alignment between HEA and Department and Government Objectives.

Despite the fact that the merger and re-designation process was first outlined in the *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* document in 2012, and the Heads of the draft Technological Universities Bill published in 2014, the legislation required for IoTs to merge has yet to be enacted. This has played a critical part in delaying the merger process and causing unnecessary uncertainty for the merging institutions and their staff. Interviewees stated “the delay in legislation has been massive. It's a key enabler in facilitating the project in moving forward” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5). Another likened it to “waiting on the platform but with no sign of the train” (Alliance A, Interviewee 1).

This delay in enacting legislation has also led to increasing frustration and has made it extremely difficult to try to build and maintain momentum through the merger process. One interviewee commented “now I think the delay in the legislation again introduced a degree of doubt - was it ever going to happen?” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5). Indeed, the absence of legislation has presented the Alliance with something of a

dilemma – should it move on regardless or wait until there is clarity and certainty? One interviewee commented

“I think...the challenge is do we still drive on with things and just view the legislation as an enabler, or do we actually say, until we are actually clear on the legislation - we won't be doing too much?” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5).

There has also been a perceived failure by the HEA to provide the necessary funding or facilitation mechanisms for the Alliance. Whether this is due to a lack of resources at their end, a failure to prioritise the merger project, or other reasons, is a matter for debate. Interviewees noted that “the HEA’s unwillingness to fund the project has been a huge limiting factor” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4). Funding equated to support and confidence for that interviewee, who stated

“funding equals support, funding equals them being willing to back a programme of change and a programme of activity. The fact is if they have visibly not been funding a programme of change [it] would lead the detractors to say if you are not getting funded why are you doing it? If you are not getting funded obviously the HEA don’t want you to do it. There is that argument and I would absolutely sign up to that argument” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).

Another stated

“comments for example from the HEA like ‘this process will have to be managed within existing resources - there is no money for this’ - this has not been helpful to us but there seems to have been change in that attitude - money was forthcoming last year” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5).

Interviewees also criticised the HEA’s perceived disinterest in the process, accusing it of “paying lip service to the change agenda” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5) and failing to take a firmer line on how they wanted to structure the country in terms of HE provision. Interviewees felt that more could be done at system level by way of facilitation between the various Alliances that are ultimately working together towards merger and TU designation.

Finally, there is a perceived lack of alignment between the HEA and Department and Government objectives, and this is having a negative impact on the process. One interviewee commented

“there seems to be a discontinuation between the policymakers and those implementing the policy. The government appears to want one thing, and [the] HEA is not necessarily totally signed up to it” (Alliance A, Interviewee 3).

This perceived disconnect between policy and strategy formulation and implementation is a point to which I will later return.

5.2.4.3 Uncertainty, Insecurity, Fear & Frustration

Within the Alliance, there are considerable feelings of uncertainty, fear, frustration and insecurity in relation to the merger process. Much of this uncertainty and fear appears to be due to a perceived lack of clarity around the process, and the absence of legislation. One interviewee commented

“I think what has happened is that the uncertainty, particularly around the legislation has created these vacuums that have enabled that questioning - that instability - that sort of concern - those negative aspects of it actually fester” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5).

Another stated

“I think people are afraid of what the future holds and afraid of what they don’t know. During the consultation we weren’t able to give people definitive answers in terms of what’s going to happen to my job and how is this going to work and how is that going to work? And that is what they wanted to know (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).”

Uncertainty around the process itself is also causing difficulty, particularly the prospect of the parties merging, yet failing to successfully complete Stage Four and secure re-designation. One interviewee commented

“what if we do all this, we get merged and they don’t make us a university?” How do you answer that? Because what could go wrong? Well what could go wrong is they change the government, we get a HEA visit that is bad, for good reasons or for bad reasons it goes pear shaped; you can’t counter-argue those. There is no

guarantee. So that's a real problem...when that merger occurs, there is uncertainty and the staff can use that and anyone who is anti can use that, and I can't think of a countervailing argument" (Alliance A, Interviewee 3).

There is also a heightened level of uncertainty and fear, caused perhaps by a lack of consultation or engagement with the wider staff body at the earlier stages of the process. One interviewee stated,

"once we did get past Stage Three, all hell broke loose because people thought - this was going to happen tomorrow and we don't know anything about it because we have not been included" (Alliance A, Interviewee 1).

This uncertainty and fear has manifested itself in a range of complex industrial relations issues, alluded to earlier, which are now effectively paralysing the process within the Alliance.

Feelings of insecurity and fear, particularly around the possibility of losing identity or autonomy, also manifest themselves within the Alliance, and are particularly evident in interviews with participants from the smaller partner, who are concerned about being 'taken over'. As one interviewee commented, some academic staff within the smaller institution see the merger

"as a huge threat, and have real fears that a lot of the programming will move towards (the larger institution) and that's something that we haven't really addressed" (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

In addition to feelings of uncertainty and fear, there is also a considerable amount of frustration with the process from those at a senior level within the Alliance, who are frustrated and tired of the blockages caused due to the failure to enact the necessary legislation, industrial relations (hereinafter referred to as IR) issues and the lack of funding and resources. One interviewee commented "energy saps, you do over-think things and you do get a bit cross and paranoid and frustrated with the lack of progress...the project is energy draining...it is hard going" (Alliance A, Interviewee 4). Another stated that "I do feel the Presidents are getting a bit weary from the whole thing, because I think it's just taking forever" (Alliance A, Interviewee 5).

5.2.4.4 Power Dynamics and Negotiations between Merging Institutions

Originally, this Alliance consisted of three individual IoTs, before one of the purported partners withdrew in 2012. According to interviewees, while this may have caused some disruption and uncertainty at the time, it actually facilitated the process, with one of the interviewee's stating "it was definitely more difficult with three" (Alliance A, Interviewee 3), and went on to say "in fact I think it is much easier to merge two partners than it is to merge three" (Alliance A, Interviewee 3).

However, differences in size and academic reputation between the two remaining partner IoTs has proved to be a significant issue throughout the merger process. One of the interviewees commented

"I guess one of the advantages we have in some ways is the size relationship... (they) are much smaller, so I think it is much easier. There is a real disadvantage to that too also obviously, as they see themselves as much smaller and see us as much more threatening to them, and that is a real problem we have to overcome" (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

There is certainly a perception of a degree of arrogance or superiority on the part of the larger partner. One interviewee states

"culturally while there is massive esteem at the higher levels where there is mutual respect, I wouldn't be surprised amongst the lecturer levels and even the administrative grades there might be a slight superiority perspective in (the larger partner institution)" (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).

Another commented

"I suppose the other thing as well is that I understand this is only anecdotally –is that there's a bit of looking down their nose at the smaller partner" (Alliance A, Interviewee 5).

The smaller partner also expressed concern about losing autonomy and power by being 'taken over' or 'swallowed up' by the larger partner. One interviewee noted

“certainly there would be a lot of concern, as the smaller party, that we would merge and that we would lose all of our identity our autonomy - we would become an outreach centre - we'd only be offering Level 6 programmes - we'd only be offering them in a small number of areas or whatever, and I suppose - we tabled that very early with them - we said this is a real fear and concern for people” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5).

Another added, that the worry of the smaller partner

“is always that they are going to be swallowed up by the big fish. So they are constantly trying to defend a position, which is frankly not helpful” (Alliance A, Interviewee 3).

Indeed, this concern about power imbalance and being swallowed up became so problematic that it threatened to undermine the entire merger process. In order to prevent this the two partners entered into an ‘integration agreement’, which was negotiated and agreed to reassure the smaller partner of its place post-merger and to allay specific concerns of and provide reassurances to the smaller partner, particularly in relation to the type and range of programmes which would be offered on the smaller campus, and representation on the senior executive team of the new institution. This was done before the mandate to merge was given by the Governing Body. Interviewees reported that the lead up to and negotiations around this integration agreement was the most difficult part of the process, with one interviewee commenting “there were some very difficult and challenging conversations around that, but they had to be had and I think all of the parties respected that” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5). Another commented

“we went into an integration agreement this spring which was the greatest challenge that we had. The people in (the larger institution) did not see the merit in it as much as we did. When you are the bigger party you are not going to see the same risks, you are not going to see the same worries. We (the smaller institution) drove the requirement for it from here. I still think it was the right thing to do” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).

This integration agreement had the effect of allaying many of concerns of the smaller institution and clearly facilitated the process.

5.2.4.5 Communicating with Staff & IR Issues

A key factor which interviewees cited as having impacted upon the progress of the Alliance through the merger process concerns a perceived lack of communication and consultation with staff, which has culminated in a series of IR issues which have plagued the project in recent months. One interviewee commented that

“communicating with our staff was a problem. Not only do we not have our academic staff engaged, we don’t really have our senior managers engaged either, and they haven’t had that involvement” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

This is in part attributable to the fact that work on the initial three phases of the project was done by a small group of people, and did not involve the wider staff community. One interviewee noted

“we kept it very tight in that it was the two Presidents, with effectively an advisor each and perhaps a Head of Strategy. So there were three individuals engaged from each institution initially. That worked very well to an extent in that it made it easier but in hindsight looking at it now it probably stilted somewhat the progress, in that it was seen to be a very central process, it didn’t really get an engagement and a buy in from the wider community in terms of senior management, staff and so on in each institution and that’s a big problem for us now” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

In addition, the delay in the process has allowed those in opposition to the merger to gain momentum. One interviewee commented “we have enabled the union to get frustrated and angry” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4) and added that

“we put great structures in place but never got round to filling them properly because there was always a road block. Theoretically I could show you some wonderful paperwork with fantastic structures and you would be thoroughly impressed by it, but we have never been able to put them in place because we didn’t move quickly enough when the TUI [Teachers Union of Ireland] decided to have industrial action with respect to the merger. We hadn’t the people in place before that to allow it to move on so we haven’t been in the position to fulfil those

structures because we didn't move in a timely fashion" (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).

Clearly these IR issues are a serious problem for the Alliance going forward, and need to be addressed as a matter of priority.

5.2.4.6 Relationships between Key People

One of the key perceived facilitatory factors in the merger process with this Alliance has been the establishment of strong formal and informal relationships between key people in both institutions. Interviewees commented on the importance of the strong relationship between the two respective Presidents, which is based on trust, respect and parity of esteem, and on the importance of the Presidents putting up a united front. Interviewees commented "the President's relationship is central to success" (Alliance A, Interviewee 4) and another that

"I suppose at a Presidential level, there's a good dynamic there, so I suppose people see that as well, you know like when we shared the Mission & Vision - both Presidents addressed both sets of staff in both organisations together. We have done a good few initiatives like that whereby for example our Governing Bodies at key points - both Presidents went to their respective Governing Bodies and even that show of unity makes a difference - I think that's important" (Alliance A, Interviewee 5).

This strong relationship has no doubt been aided by the fact that there has been agreement about their individual futures. As one interviewee stated

"if you have got two Presidents vying for the same job at the end of the day, it just ain't going to happen. If you can get the two presidents to agree what their futures are, then it is going to happen" (Alliance A, Interviewee 3).

The data also suggests that the development of strong working relationships between the Steering Groups, Implementation Teams and Project Managers/Coordinators, has been a key facilitator in the process. One interviewee commented

“certainly we would have a strong interpersonal relationship in terms of being able to be honest with other. We are certainly not only interested in fighting only our own institute’s corner” (Alliance A, Interviewee 1).

Another added

“what worked well is we have people who can work well together and it comes down to the selection of individuals to work on the project, [which] was almost accidentally good” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).

In particular, interviewees commented on the commitment of the Project Managers/Coordinators to the project outcome and strong working relationship between them, which had helped to overcome impasses along the way.

5.2.4.7 Role of External Consultants & Facilitators

Both partners in the Alliance appointed their own external consultants, along with an Independent Chair, at an early stage in the merger process, and this has been perceived by interviewees as a facilitatory factor in the process. Internally, these consultants have had the benefit of providing comfort and confidence internally to the Project Steering/Implementation groups, with one interviewee commenting “I do think the external advice to us was hugely influential in giving us the confidence to say look this has been done before...” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

In addition, they provided specific expertise and knowledge not available within the institutions themselves. One interviewee highlighted the benefits in this regard, commenting

“there was the higher level aspect of design if a new institution, and design of a new TU, and what it meant, how it should be structured and so on, so those consultants were higher education experts who gave that expertise. They also carried an authority with them in that they had done it before and I think that worked very well with people in that they had the real life experience, they could put up front a lot of the issues that they probably knew were coming, they were both quite good in terms of structures also, so there was a lot of useful advice coming from them” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

The external consultants have also acted as mediators during the process, and this has been beneficial. One interviewee noted

“having people involved in the process who would act as mediators – not with the formal role as a mediator – but act as a mediator and help smooth over the bumpy times has been very helpful as well” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).

Externally, the consultants appointed have been seen to provide confidence and credibility to the process, particularly in relation to key external stakeholders, such as the HEA. One interviewee stated

“we have enough expertise in our own organisation to do this but the problem is perspective and the problem is what people think. You know when you are funded by a government agency, or a government organisation they want to see external influence, and they want to see external input” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).

5.2.4.8 Trust, Honesty & Understanding

As noted above, this Alliance has developed strong working relationships between key people in both partner institutions, and this has enabled the development of trust, honesty and understanding between the partners, which is perceived as being facilitatory. Trust at leadership level is perceived as being critical, and the two Presidents appear to have led by example in this regard, with one interviewee noting “the trust has been very good between the Presidents. Even though, like a marriage, there have been ups and downs, they have been generally quite good” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4). Another commented that “a lot of the early relationship building and trust happened pretty much on a bilateral basis between the two Presidents” (Alliance A, Interviewee 1).

This appears to have set the tone for the subsequent process and has cascaded down to others in the Project Team, with one commenting “you have to have that degree of trust and you have to take people at their word” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4) and another that “I think there was definitely trust, and there is trust” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5).

In addition to trust, the parties have acted in a manner that is open and honest, even when this might cause difficulties. One commented “certainly we would have a

strong interpersonal relationship in terms of being able to be honest with other” (Alliance A, Interviewee 1) and another “I suppose to give comfort to both partners, and I have to say in fairness, both partners are very open - there are no skeletons in closets - we do talk openly and so on” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5).

Honesty, it appears, is key to the process, with one interviewee stating “honesty has been central to the whole thing...people’s willingness to say what they think in a very frank manner and blow up every now and again” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).

Indeed, this ability to be frank, have a disagreement yet move on is perceived as being key to success. There will naturally be ups and downs during the process, and there may be difficult periods which test the determination of the Alliance to succeed. In this case, it was the period before and during the negotiation of the Integration Agreement, which caused the most difficulty and led to trust been damaged, but not eroded. As one interviewee commented,

“there is trust there and even though it was bruised for a period of time we are all right again...trust had to be built up, trust was broken and trust has been rebuilt again... learning how to have a row and make up and move on has been a huge challenge and they are getting there but it has been tough. That slowed progress but did it as we were going nowhere anyway so we may as well have the row and get it out of our systems and we did” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).

5.2.4.9 Resources

Based on respondents perceptions, a lack of resources is another inhibitory factor for Alliance A. As discussed above, there was a lack of external funding from the HEA to support the institutions during the process, although there is acknowledgement that this has begun to change. One interviewee commented

“even the funding, and we all recognise that merging institutions requires funding, it’s almost begrudgingly been granted now by the HEA in response to demands from the institutions” (Alliance A, Interviewee 2).

In addition to the perceived failure of the HEA to provide the necessary funding mechanisms, there has also been an internal failure on the part of the Alliance itself to

commit the necessary human and financial resources to the merger project. As one interviewee commented

“no extra staff was employed. The work and documents were fitted in between our (myself and a colleague’s) full time jobs, sometimes working on the documents at 4.00 a.m.” (Alliance A, Interviewee 1).

There is acknowledgement from the interviewees that this has been problematic. One commented

“we have not resourced the project properly at all. We did not resource it and we have failed to resource it. Not to make an excuse for ourselves but we planned good structures, we planned good organisation around the project, we have not resourced it” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4).

Almost all interviewees referred to the fact that the project was being done “on a shoestring” (Alliance A, Interviewee 1), with one commenting “it’s just that there is so much going on and it’s the time and the resources to put into it, when you’re also trying to do the day job” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5). The interviewee added:

“to be honest with you, because of the absence of appropriate funding to support it, it is being run on a shoestring and it is challenging because there is a significant body of work to be done around it” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5).

Interviewees referred to the fact that the project is “energy draining” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4) and “hard going” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4) and that they would like people to sub in and out of the project to give them a break. This is clearly an issue the Alliance needs to address if it is to succeed on the road ahead.

5.2.4.10 Building & Maintaining Momentum & Stability

The data collected indicates that the merger process has been perceived as very stop/start in nature, due to a variety of factors, both internal and external. External factors include delays with the process on the part of the HEA, the lack of necessary legislation, the lack of external funding to support the project. Internal delays include IR issues and the failure to commit the necessary human and financial resources to the project. This has made it extremely difficult to build and maintain any real momentum throughout the process. One interviewee commented “we couldn’t have moved slower and we couldn’t

have been more lethargic” (Alliance A, Interviewee 4) and another, that “we have almost ourselves contributed to kind of ‘this will never happen’ out there - this is ridiculous - all the time and effort and it will never happen, and those delays haven't helped us” (Alliance A, Interviewee 5). This has clearly inhibited the progress of the Alliance.

5.2.5 Conclusion & Recommendations

From the above, it is clear that there are a number of key factors, arising both at institutional and system level, which are perceived as having facilitated or inhibited the progress of this Alliance through the merger and re-designation process. These are summarised below:

Key Facilitatory Factors

- At Institutional Level:
 - Establishment of strong formal and informal relationships between key people in both institutions, particularly at leadership level.
 - Development of relationships based on trust, honesty, openness and understanding.
 - Ability to be honest and frank, and to have a disagreement and move on.
 - Providing necessary reassurances to the smaller partner through an integration agreement.
 - Appointment of credible and knowledgeable external consultants to provide advice, comfort, confidence and credibility, internally and externally.
 - Getting the right project managers in place, who are committed to the merger and have a strong working relationship.

Key Inhibitory Factors

- At System Level
 - Uncertainties within and difficulties with the HEA criteria and process for merger and re-designation, particularly at Stage Three.
 - Failure of government to enact necessary legislation and the resultant uncertainty regarding timelines for merger, staffing concerns, etc.
 - Perceived lack of alignment between HEA and Department & Government objectives.

- Perceived failure of HEA to provide necessary funding mechanisms.
- At Institutional Level
 - Failure to engage staff in the process and resultant IR issues.
 - Failure to commit the necessary human and financial resources.
 - Feelings of uncertainty, fear, frustration and insecurity in relation to the merger process.
 - Concerns about power imbalance, the possibility of losing identity or autonomy and being ‘swallowed up’.
 - Inability to build and maintain momentum throughout the process.

It is evident from the above that while all of the perceived facilitatory factors in this case are internal, many of the factors which interviewees perceived as being inhibitory are external. This is problematic for the Alliance in that many of these are outside of its control, or at least perceived to be, and will require continued lobbying and pressure to be put on key system level actors to redress the difficulties in relation to legislation, funding and advice/facilitation. However, there are a number of key actions which the Alliance itself can take to facilitate the process. These are summarised below:

- Form a coalition with other Alliances of IoTs who are merging to lobby at system level for legislation, funding and facilitation mechanisms.
- Continue to work to address the IR issues. Ideally, this should be facilitated at national/system level, as similar issues arise in all of the Alliances. However, at institutional level, the Alliances need to focus on communicating with, consulting and engaging staff with the project where and when possible in the interim.
- Set a date for merger and work to that date, despite the lack of legislation. This will allow the Alliance to build momentum, gain confidence and put increasing pressure on system level actors to resolve issues at their end.
- Commit the necessary human resources to the project. People who are committed to the project must be chosen to work on a dedicated project team, on a full time basis.
- Consider bringing new people into work on the project to ‘freshen up’ the existing project steering/implementation teams, as fatigue and frustration will inevitably begin to set in, particularly after such a challenging 4-5 year period.

- Secure and commit the necessary financial resources to the project and seek alternative sources of funding to address any shortfall in exchequer funding, as per the International Panel recommendations. The Alliance should have a joint budget for the project, out of which project specific expenses are paid.
- Review the suitability of the proposed governance and management structure for the new TU in line with the International Panel recommendations.
- Reconsider the distinctiveness and relevance of the proposed mission and vision for the new TU, again in line with the International Panel's recommendations.

5.3 Alliance B

5.3.1 Introduction

This case study examines the proposed merger between two Irish IoTs, which began in 2011, but from which one of the partners unilaterally withdrew in late 2014, following a series of delays, setbacks and a very public fall out between the partners. Since then, efforts have been made to get the Alliance back on track. This case study examines the background and context to this Alliance, along with the particular factors which are perceived as having impacted upon its progress to date, particularly those which caused a breakdown in the process and led to the withdrawal of one of the partners.

5.3.2 Background & Context

Alliance B consists of 2 IoTs, both of which were established in 1970. The two institutions are briefly described below.

IoT 1 is a multi-campus institution, consisting of one main campus and two smaller campuses, (which primarily provide for part time HE students), located around its region. Its main campus is based in a regional town. It is currently the sixth largest of Ireland's 14 IoTs, catering for approximately 7,000 students and staff.

IoT 2 is situated approximately 75 kilometers from IoT 1, in the largest city in the region. It is the third largest IoT in the State, catering for approximately 9,000 students and staff. It is the larger of the two institutions, although not significantly. It has extensively campaigned for re-designation as a university under the Universities Act 1997, without success.

Historically, there has been very little collaboration between the two IoTs, despite their close geographical proximity to each other. In fact, the past relationship between the two institutions could be described as competitive rather than collaborative. The table below highlights the key features of Alliance B.

Table 17: Alliance B - Key Points

| Alliance B – Key Points | |
|--|---|
| Number of Partner IoTs | Two |
| Relative locations | All located within a loosely defined region – main campuses approximately 75 kms apart (journey time of 1 hour approx.) with various outreach campuses spread widely across the region |
| Historical Context | One partner had been seeking re-designation as a University for a number of years, the other had not. There is no existing university in the region. |
| Size and Scale | The two partners are relatively similar in size and scale, although one is slightly larger with 8200 students, while the other has 6,325 (according to HEA data on student enrolments 2014/15). |
| Academic Programme Offerings | Broadly similar programme profile, both in terms of level of awards and discipline areas. The larger IoT has a stronger established research profile than its smaller partner. |
| Ethos/Missions | Broadly similar- both IoTs have strong ties to their local communities and regions, from which most of their students come. |
| Projected combined student numbers (as per published HEA enrolment figures 2014/15) | 14,500 students |

5.3.3 Progress to Date

Following the publication of the National Strategy in 2010, an approach was made by IoT 2 to IoT 1 to enter into discussions around the possibility of merging and making an application to be re-designated as a TU. Shortly thereafter both IoTs met to discuss potential collaborative arrangements. The subsequent publication of the *Programme for Government in Ireland 2011-2016*, in which the government committed

to “*explore the establishment of a multi campus Technical University*” in the region, was a clear signal of support, and perhaps even dictat, for the two IoTs to ‘ramp up’ the merger process with a view to securing TU status. This is the only region in which the Government specifically and publically committed to exploring the establishment of a TU and it is the only geographical region in Ireland which does not have a traditional university, despite a long standing campaign by IoT 2 to be upgraded.

The discussions, however, were interrupted shortly after their commencement, due to a change of President and Chair of Governing Body in both institutions. The term of office of the Chairs of both IoTs ended and they were replaced. Amid some controversy, the then President of IoT 2 was not re-appointed by the Governing Body when his term expired, and that post had to be filled. It took until early 2012 to appoint a new Chair and President to IoT 2. To complicate matters further, the new President appointed to IoT 2, had been the President of IoT 1 up to that time. In fact, at the end of 2011, following discussions with the relevant Minister, Department Officials, the HEA, and IoT 2, an effort was made to fast track the process of merger. It was proposed that the then President of IoT 1 be appointed joint President of both IoTs, with a Vice President appointed in each Institute. This was subsequently rejected by the Governing Body of IoT 2. IoT 1 had then to find a replacement President and this appointment was made in 2012. Undoubtedly this caused significant difficulties which will be discussed later.

Once the new Chairs and Presidents were in place, a project structure was established, a MOU signed and a joint submission made to the HEA in July 2012, containing a formal expression of interest as per stage one requirements. The HEA had indicated that it would advise the institutions within a reasonable period (no longer than six months) as to whether or not the proposal may proceed to the next stage. Unfortunately, the HEA did not adhere to its own timeline. In parallel to this process, the HEA commissioned an international expert panel to draw up a new, ‘ideal’ configuration of the Irish HE landscape. When the findings of this internal expert panel proved to be unpalatable, the HEA then completed its own system configuration exercise, based on the submissions made to it by the universities and IoTs in July 2012. This resulted in considerable delay and it was not until May 2013 that the HEA acknowledged receipt of the formal expression of interest from the Alliance and indicated that the proposal could proceed to Stage Two. This resulted in a loss of momentum built up by the partners in 2012.

Nonetheless, from July 2012 the partners continued to make some progress, agreeing to scope out the due diligence exercise and agreeing dates for joint meetings of the Governing Bodies of both IoTs. However, progress came to a halt again at the end of 2012 when the Chairs and Presidents of both Institutes postponed a planned joint meeting of both Governing Bodies following a report by the Controller & Auditor General in relation to the accrual of expenses and financial expenditure at IoT 2. Following that report, the Minister issued an order for a statutory inspection of the arrangements in IoT 2, and this resulted in the proposed merger process being effectively put on hold until the investigation was completed and the report published in July 2013. During this period there was little to no communication between the partner institutions.

Following this report, the Governing Body of IoT 1 agreed that the completion of a due diligence process on IoT 2 was a critical element of the preparation of a business plan for merger and that it must form an integral part of the HEA Stage Two application process. At this stage, there continued to be a low level of engagement between the partners, and as progress was particularly slow, a regionally based government Minister announced in September 2013 that an independent external coordinator would be appointed to Chair the Steering Group, and to assist the Alliance.

Despite the appointment of a new Project Chair, and the partners having agreed in principle to due diligence, from August 2013 until January 2014 there was a failure to agree on the terms of reference for the actual due diligence process and on various other issues. In particular, difficulty appeared to arise in relation to the execution of the due diligence process. Following a public procurement process, (which took a number of months to agree on and resulted in bickering between the partners), the due diligence on IoT 2 on behalf of IoT 1 began in July 2014. However, difficulties and delays continued, and intervention from the HEA and two government Ministers was required to unblock the impasse. It appears that this intervention had an immediate impact and dates were agreed for the first phase of the fieldwork in IoT 2.

In parallel to this process, in early 2014 IoT 2 commissioned an international HE academic to conduct a '*High Level Assessment of the Future Potential of a new Higher Education Institution*' created from the Proposed Merger of IoT 1 and IoT 2. Again, there was some disagreement between the parties regarding the need for this exercise but nonetheless the report was commissioned, with the external academic visiting IoT 1 in the summer of 2014 and later drafting his report. In October 2014, the President of IoT 2 informed the President of IoT 1 that he had received the draft report and that in his view

the document concluded a significant risk to IoT 2 by IoT 1 that could end the TU project, or could at the very least result in a significant delay to the project. IoT 1 felt that this was in contradiction to feedback they had been given directly by the report's author. Some correspondence ensued between the President of IoT 1 and the author of the report. Following a meeting with the President of IoT 1, the author wrote to the Presidents of both institutions advising them of his decision to withdraw the draft report, and withdrawing himself from the process.

Less than a week later IoT 1 received email communication from the President of IoT 2 informing it of its decision to suspend activities on the TU project, expressing concerns about the potential of the Alliance to meet the TU criteria, based on the disputed report. This announcement was followed by a public announcement by IoT 1 detailing their surprise at the statements, as they thought they had reached agreement on key management and organisational issues and could move forward. Following this statement, IoT 2 announced that its Governing Body was suspending its engagement with the project including planning and all related activity, in addition to the completion of due diligence exercises.

The events of this time are subject to a vast amount of disagreement between the parties. Much negative local and national media coverage followed, and the common theme in much of the discourse at that time related to the research metrics around at each IoT and proposed governance and management structures for the new institution. The State's Public Accounts Committee, a body set up to investigate the expenditure of public finances, also became involved at this stage, asking questions about expenditure on the project to date and requiring the Presidents of both IoTs to make submissions and appear before them. Again, the intervention of a Government Minister was required to get the process back on track, and in November 2014 the Minister appointed another external person to lead a new process of consultation with both IoTs in order to develop a shared vision for the proposed TU, to report on the feasibility and best structure to implement the project and the potential timescale.

Also at this time, following much debate and apparent confusion around whether or not governance and management structures had been agreed, and apparent difficulties in communications between the Chair, President, Executive and Board of IoT 2, the Chair of IoT 2's Governing Body stepped down and a new Chair was appointed in November 2014. Additionally, in early 2015 it was announced that the President of IoT 2

was being seconded by the HEA to work on another project, and would be replaced by a new President.

During this time the external expert appointed by government continued to engage in the process of consultation and in July 2015, published his report (noting that due to the position taken by IoT 2, it did not prove possible to have any round-table engagement involving both Institutes as part of the process, nor was it possible to produce a validated set of aggregate data addressing TU metrics, combined across both Institutes). He re-confirmed the commitment of both Institutes to the development of a TU for the region and articulated the strength of conviction by regional stakeholders about the imperative to progress this without further avoidable delay. He recommended that any substantive re-engagement could only follow a preliminary engagement process which would involve Chairs and Presidents in the first instance, to ventilate the underlying reasons for the current state of relationships and create a framework within which mutual trust and respect can be re-built, as a stepping stone to substantive engagement. He stated that while it would not be easy, it was achievable.

Following the publication of this report, the Presidents and Chairs of both IoTs met with relevant Ministers and agreed to enter into a process of facilitation, which came to a successful conclusion in January 2016, when the Governing Body of IoT 2 agreed to re-enter TU talks with IoT 1. Since then, the Alliance made a joint application for funding to the HEA and has secured almost €1.6 million in funding from the HEA to further progress the merger and re-designation project. This is seen as a clear signal of support for the project, although little further progress has been evident. Recently, the publication of the *Programme for Partnership 2016* (an agreement for government between the largest party and independents which support the minority government) which states that if an argument could be made that a merger is not feasible for geographical reasons, then an IoT could apply for TU designation alone, has also caused unnecessary uncertainty.

5.3.4 Key Factors Impacting upon Merger and Re-designation Process

The data gathered and analysed has highlighted that the following key factors are perceived as impacting in particular on the progress of Alliance B through the merger and re-designation process. These are summarised in Table 18 and discussed in detail below:

Table 18: Key Factors Impacting Upon Process - Alliance B

| Alliance B – Key Factors | Refs in Interview data | Sources |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Distrust, Suspicion, Hostility & Resentment | 75 | 7 |
| The Political Landscape | 68 | 7 |
| Securing the Support of the Senior Executive Team | 49 | 6 |
| Lack of Government HEA & Department Support, Commitment, Understanding & Clarity | 44 | 6 |
| Blocking, Delaying Tactics and ‘Game Playing’ | 41 | 7 |
| Power Dynamics & Negotiations between Merging Institutions | 34 | 7 |
| Role of External Consultants & Facilitators | 33 | 6 |
| Lack of Commitment, Belief & Passion | 32 | 7 |
| Leadership & Charisma | 32 | 6 |
| Cultural Issues, Values & Identity | 31 | 7 |

5.3.4.1 Distrust, Suspicion, Hostility & Resentment

The data highlights considerable levels of distrust, hostility, resentment and even at times, paranoia between the partners. This is likely both a cause of and a result of the considerable difficulties which the Alliance has encountered during the process to date. There is an enormous amount of distrust, which manifests itself between the partner institutions themselves, within the individual merging institutions, and between the institutions and system level actors in the process. One interviewee commented “I think that the global phrase was that there was a lack of trust” (Alliance B, Interviewee 3).

Distrust appears to have sprung from a variety of sources. Firstly, as one interviewee commented, that “there was a history of lack of trust and lack of working together between the two institutes” (Alliance B, Interviewee 2), and certainly this had an impact on the process. However, this alone does not explain the levels of distrust generated throughout the process, which is universally acknowledged as a key inhibitory factor. Some interviewees commented on the apparent lack of trust between the two Presidents, stating

“if the two Presidents clearly aren't showing trust, then the next level [of staff] is clearly going to behave in a way in which they're watching themselves and watching their President and watching their Chair and in any joint meetings, they're all going to be boxing clever and not saying much, which is again not terribly useful in an academic merger” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6).

Certainly, the perceived absence of a trusting relationship at this level has had a considerable inhibitory impact and did not facilitate the creation of trusting relationships at lower levels within the Alliance. The changes in personnel outlined above also made it more difficult for stable, trusting relationships to form. One interviewee felt that distrust came from “the overall dishonesty in the process...the fact that the feeling was that this process was going to happen by some kind of political stroke” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5).

Distrust has manifested itself continuously, in various ways and at various stages throughout the process. For example, one interviewee noted that “the lack of trust was evidenced by separate positions, separate papers...just painful” (Alliance B, Interviewee 3). The lack of trust was particularly evident in relation to the due diligence exercise. One interviewee commented “I think the whole rigmarole around the due diligence was a massive red herring and a massive delaying tactic and it spoke to the suspicions of both organisations of one another” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5) and added that the approach taken to due diligence “was a sort of ‘we want to expose all of your dirty little secrets’ approach” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5).

This distrust has marred the whole process. One interviewee commented “there wasn't that trust there and that clearly has played through and continues...it's like the writing inside a barrel of rock - it continues with us to this day” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6). Another stated “when you saw mistrust, no cooperation, no intention of cooperating really, then it became a dead duck if you ask me” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7). Clearly this is a key issue which needs to be addressed by the Alliance if it is to move forward in any meaningful way.

In addition to distrust, interviewees also reported feeling that the process itself was dishonest. This dishonesty arose both between the institutions themselves and between the institutions and system level actors. One interviewee referred to the fact that “I think there was a lot of the 'three faces of Janus' behaviour going on” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6) and another that “the whole thing was founded on smoke and mirrors” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5). This dishonesty contributed towards the feelings of distrust,

and also gave rise to feelings of suspicion, rumour, and even paranoia within the Alliance. Comments from interviewees such as “what are the real agendas?” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5), “they were absolutely taking direction from outside the room” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5), “he came in with sort of - well he appeared to have an agenda” (Alliance B, Interviewee 2) and “they had been fed so many lies” (Alliance B, Interviewee 4) provide clear evidence of the levels of suspicion and paranoia involved in the process, and led to every action by one partner being second guessed by the other, and each partner seeming to read an ulterior motive into almost everything the other did.

Because of the levels of distrust, dishonesty and suspicion, it is not surprising that interviewees reported strong feelings of hostility, resentment and antagonism within the Alliance. This was acknowledged by one interviewee who commented “there was actually a fair degree of hostility from time to time” (Alliance B, Interviewee 2). Another interviewee commented

“there has been a perceived power imbalance where (one of the institutions) see themselves as top dog and that they should be running the show and that we are a less accomplished institution certainly in the areas of research and therefore we are not operating at university level and that has created problems - it has created resentments and mistrust - so yeah it been a big factor” (Alliance B, Interviewee 2).

Yet another added that, “there was complete disregard for one by the other, and that made it hard. That disenchanted me and made me think it wasn’t going to happen” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7).

5.3.4.2 The Political Landscape

From the publication of the *Programme for Government in 2011*, which contained a specific reference to exploring the possibility of creating a multi campus TU in the region, this Alliance has been subject to particular political attention. In particular, key national and local politicians from the region were perceived as being the main drivers of the TU and re-designation agenda, particularly at the early stages of the process. One interviewee acknowledged “I suppose the big thing was that there was a political driver early on for it to happen” (Alliance B, Interviewee 2).

While this may seem unusual, given that HEIs are by their very nature supposed to be autonomous, independent institutions, Irish IoTs appear to be something of an

exception. One interviewee commented that “the politicians regard the IoTs as their playthings” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6) and that “the politics of the Department of Education has always been to keep the IoTs in their place, ready to receive a Minister to cut a ribbon for a regional aim” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6). The interviewee added

“there's very much an element of expediency, vanity project, ribbon cutting, kissing the baby, new university in the (region). It's very political, but that's kind of the way the Department has nurtured them to be, and they have always been told – ‘you will do this - you won't do that’ and that kind of culture really is right the way through - oh put our laimh suas [hands up] and ask can we do that – ‘is it ok Department of Education - is it ok that we build that or we do this or whatever’. I certainly find the IoTs very, very political” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6).

Some interviewees viewed the input of key political actors as supportive, commenting “if we had been ready to avail of the opportunity then the political help was absolutely helpful” (Alliance B, Interviewee 4). However the majority of interviewees have been very critical, accusing key political actors of interference, causing disruption and of ‘playing politics’ with the merger process. One commented “so it was a political stroke. It's not part of policy” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7) and another that

“it has been inordinately politicised. I think the external political influence on the project from beginning to end has been extraordinarily and really, really disturbingly disruptive you know, so yeah it has been a political process from start to finish” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5).

Political input came from all levels, including the Minister for Education and Skills, with one interviewee noting

“so there has been a lot of political input in terms of party politics I suppose and Ministers pushing in order to see developments but that always hasn't translated into being a positive force for the good of the project. In fact its maybe mired some or confused some of the issues which were at stake” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6).

Another interviewee commented that “the Minister got directly involved into pulling heads and banging heads together in what was supposed to be a voluntary merger” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7).

This level of political input was particularly unwelcome amongst interviewees in the partner IoT which had been campaigning for university status on its own for some time. They felt strongly that this was an unwarranted level of political interference with their institution and was a political solution to avoid granting it university status, for which it had long campaigned. One such interviewee commented

“there was a feeling that this was going to happen, either without us, despite us, it’s going to happen. And that seems to be still the way. Whatever we think doesn’t matter, it’s going to happen. So just let it happen. So that brought out the worst in both of us, which was ‘let’s get out of it what we can’, you know” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5).

Interviewees also reported that there were unrealistic expectations from politicians and government in relation to the merger, stating “politicians didn’t want to know about the hard facts” (Alliance B, Interviewee 3) and another that

“it was a big opportunity but there was never a realistic understanding of what was involved in terms of investment and work to make a properly functioning organisation and I wouldn’t expect the politicians to know. You would have hoped that they would have been advised by the experienced education people in the Department and in the HEA. But whether they didn’t listen or whether they weren’t given that advice, I don’t know. They seemed to think it was another kind of zap them together” (Alliance B, Interviewee 4).

Some interviewees felt that the institutional leaders, cognisant of the political pressure, were simply ‘playing along’ with the politicians and the Department, and were afraid to say no or to be seen as ‘dragging their heels’ with the politicians. One commented

“neither of them wanted, and this was from the political appointees of the Chairs, and even in a sense the Presidents, neither wanted to be seen to be dragging their heels with the politicians. Neither wanted to be seen to be the one to blame for the

thing not happening. And that was their main concern. That put a stop on any real talks” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7).

He went on to state that the institutions “play the game. They don’t want to piss off the boss. And that’s what’s wrong...neither of the institutions wanted to piss off (a Senior Government Minister), nor did the Department or the HEA because he had the purse strings” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7) and added that the leaders “were kowtowing to the Department” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7). Certainly this raises further issues in relation to the autonomy of Irish IoTs.

5.3.4.3 Securing the Support of the Senior Executive Team

Throughout the process interviewees reported a perceived failure by the leaders of one of the institutions to get the Senior Executives on board. One of Presidents moved directly from being President of IoT 1 to IoT 2, and in the process, almost became President of both institutions. However the Governing Body in IoT 2 refused to allow this. This situation immediately led to mistrust between the President and the Senior Executive, who were clearly suspicious of the new President and who, as a result, would repeatedly call into question data, metrics, etc., which were presented to them. One interviewee commented “he never really got the trust of the management”, “he didn’t have the executive with him” and “his executive team didn’t trust him...he wasn’t aligning himself with them.” He stated

“when the President tried to give them a sanitised version of what this merger was all about, it didn’t fly very well. It certainly didn’t give comfort or security to any of them that he was looking after the interests or the ambitions of their institution terribly well in all of this” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6).

One interviewee from the partner institution commented that there was

“mistrust in the President and evidence that the senior management team didn’t really bond well with the new President so any move forward that he made always, I think, always was being challenged. So his position increasingly became untenable” (Alliance B, Interviewee 2).

This level of distrust and suspicion made the relationship very fraught and it would be difficult to see how a merger and re-designation process could be successful in such

circumstances. Indeed, eventually the President in question moved to an alternative role outside the institution and has since been replaced.

This poor relationship between the President and the Senior Executive led to a significant amount of both overt and covert resistance to the merger. One interviewee commented

“talk to senior managers here - well we weren't very happy with it - there was an awful lot of compromising - a lot of biting of lips, but we went with it for the greater good - for peace and quiet - to get things over the line” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6).

However, continued resistance ultimately culminated in the institution unilaterally withdrawing from the merger talks, following a much disputed external report commissioned by the institution. One interviewee commented “as a result of them then actually beginning to take control, that's when they [the Senior Executive] eventually ended up saying ‘thus far and no further’” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7). This did not come without a price however, with interviewees reporting that there “was a real fracturing in the organisation over the last year around this project” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6), and others that “there was a lot of blood spilled” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5) and “morale is on the floor” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6).

In addition, various degrees of resistance on the part of the executive teams in both institutions manifested itself throughout the process as 'tribalism', and posturing for position, particularly at joint meetings of the executives. One interviewee commented “there's no doubt yea - jockeying for position I suppose is a phrase I have heard around here and I suppose everybody is trying to look after their own back” (Alliance B, Interviewee 3) and that “everybody was fighting turf and hanging on to what they have” (Alliance B, Interviewee 3). Certainly the positioning that people took to protect themselves and their own interests throughout the process was not helpful and clearly inhibited progress.

5.3.4.4 Lack of Government HEA & Department Support, Commitment, Understanding & Clarity

In contrast to the significant interest displayed in the merger and re-designation by local and national politicians, interviewees from this Alliance encountered a perceived

'hands off', disinterested approach from both HEA & Department, which has inhibited progress to date. Interviewees reported that initially the HEA were very reluctant to be a participant in the process. One commented

“now considering that they wrote the national strategy and had it approved, it sent out a very mixed message. We had addressed the matter with them and we were told categorically that they were not a stakeholder in the process and that their only role was to assess applications as they came in. They were the funding agency, they were the ones setting the strategy, but we didn't feel they were supportive of the project” (Alliance B, Interviewee 1).

The DoES were also perceived as having taken a back seat, with one interviewee commenting “the Department seem distant from it” (Alliance B, Interviewee 2). With reference to the HEA one interviewee commented

“we asked them very early on at a budget meeting, what support we could expect from them for a TU, and they basically said none because they said they had to administer the process so they couldn't get involved in supporting individual colleges in becoming a TU or meeting TU criteria” (Alliance B, Interviewee 4).

This perceived disinterest and lack of support by the HEA certainly did not inspire confidence in the institutions to move on with the process. One interviewee noted

“both the Department and the HEA, neither have been supportive of either institution actually. All they have been is critical. All they have been is insisting that what they want happens and there has been a real dishonesty about looking at the evidence... so I would think that neither have been helpful at all” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5).

This perceived inconsistency of behaviour of HEA & the Department led interviewees to question the motives and real intent of both throughout the process. One interviewee reported that

“one senior member of the HEA actually said, in an open forum, they would be more than happy to see us all merging because they would have fewer lines in their excel spreadsheet for budgets and all the rest, fewer colleges to deal with, and that was in a completely open forum. So you could come into the room and they would say ‘so here is another college that wants to be a TU’” (Alliance B, Interviewee 4).

Another interviewee also questioned the agenda of the HEA, stating

“there is always questions around the HEA and the HEA board, that the whole agenda is being driven by the universities and the universities were happy enough with the mergers and to mess about with the IoT sector, but they wanted to keep their patch clean and didn’t want to see any more competition coming into their patch in terms of the TUs that may be attracting or seeking to attract more research funding. And there was a feeling also that the criteria to set up a TU were driven by the universities attempting to put up artificial barriers to stop IoTs being able to become TUs. So there is considerable mistrust, is probably too strong a word, but considerable ambivalence I think in the sector in terms of the role of the HEA in driving this project” (Alliance B, Interviewee 2).

Clearly this sort of approach would not in any way facilitate the Alliance’s progression through the process, and would lead to serious questions being asked in relation to the alignment of the actions of the HEA with espoused national policy and strategy.

Interviewees also highlighted a number of additional perceived system level inhibitors to progress. Some commented on the perceived lack of understanding by the HEA, with one commenting “what you were getting all the time is a drip-feed from the HEA who were completely at sea with this process, who didn’t know what they were about” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7). Others highlighted their failure to provide clarity around the process and criteria for re-designation, and the failure to prioritise the merger and re-designation process. The failure to enact the necessary legislation and the failure to provide funding mechanisms (until recently) were also key inhibitory factors for the Alliance, with one interviewee commenting

“they kept the process going on a sort of a wink and a nod basis without actually addressing the resources issue. I mean if they were really serious they would be pumping money into the institutes to become bigger and better things. And it would be incentive driven - a reform driven agenda. There was no financial incentive put in place to make the policy happen. So that was a clear indication that they were not serious about the policy” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7).

5.3.4.5 Blocking, Delaying Tactics and ‘Game Playing

For a time at the beginning of the process, the Alliance seemed to be making progress. Project Steering Groups and Working Groups were put in place, and meetings occurred reasonably frequently. However, interviewees reported that very little progress would be made at and between meetings and eventually progress slowed, meetings became less frequent, working groups failed to meet or progress items, and people became increasingly unavailable. This appears to be the result of perceived diversionary and delaying tactics which it was felt were employed by people from both institutions, many of whom, one interviewee stated, felt as if “well I can’t be seen to be against it publically, but I’m not going to move it forward” (Alliance B, Interviewee 1). This led to what one interviewee described as “cunning blocking mechanisms” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6) being put in place. One interviewee described an example as follows.

“When it came, as it naturally will do in a merger, around the much more harsher realities of what a merger is all about, then you certainly started to hear language that was not of a merger type nature, even around the communication strategy - you know we might pilot a paper - a classic open-framed paper on communication strategy cross merger which had been tested against Finland and UK and what not. The response was muted and the response was not action oriented – it was like - what was the expression - smothering the baby at birth - not giving it a chance to survive, so if each module of the merger was not given a chance to survive, then the whole thing - the sum of its parts was never really going to survive...they were only discussions in the abstract - there was no action orientated piece coming out of it so in terms of blocking - yes - if you mean a movement from discussion to action, - there was always a block, which I would describe as smothering the baby at birth - clever enough to block - it’s not overt - it’s not adversarial - it’s just death by a thousand cuts” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6).

The interviewee continued

“one President might say - we really need to push forward on a, b and c and the other institution would kill it - would just not act, and equally the other institution would say "we really need to push forward on e, f and g and the other institution

would kill it and they both killed different things for their own different internal reasons, whether that was because they could perceive that they had a weakness in a particular area - research whatever - public accounts committee, quality - they would kill a certain module or piece of what the merger should have been about”, concluding “it was terribly carefully killed at birth” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6).

Such actions by the partner institutions certainly prevented any real progress. One interviewee accused the institutions of 'game playing' and 'box ticking', stating

“it was totally frustrating because from the outside you had this game playing between the two institutions with a failure to really engage...they were playing around...people don't mean what they say. They play along, play to power, and play the game. They were ticking off things but nobody was internalising it. It has no carry back into the institutions” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7).

This perceived failure to engage meaningfully in the process prevented the Alliance making any real progress.

5.3.4.6 Power Dynamics & Negotiations between Merging Institutions

As noted earlier, there was no history of collaboration between the two partners in this Alliance prior to 2011. In fact the past relationship between the two was sometimes strained and competitive. One interviewee noted “they wouldn't have been natural bedfellows” (Alliance B, Interviewee 2). Another commented “I think we behaved as if we were rivals...we never recognised that we weren't rivals you know, so I think that did have an impact, yeah” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5). In the past engagement or cooperation between the two was not encouraged, with one interviewee commenting “there was no engagement at all, and engagement was actually positively discouraged here, positively discouraged” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5).

It is not surprising then that when negotiations begun between the two, there were significant power plays between them, with both institutions seeking to establish as much bargaining power as possible, and this has had an inhibitory effect on the process. One interviewee commented “logic was out the window. This was simply a power play. That's simply what it was” (Alliance B, Interviewee 4).

A lot of the issues appear to have stemmed from the fact that the Institutions are reasonably similar in size (although one is slightly larger than the other). This difficulty was acknowledged by the interviewees, who commented

“I suppose the other thing too that we are trying to do, and it is very difficult, is that we are trying to effect a merger of equals, or near as damn as equals, so there’s not a great record of success in those situations” (Alliance B, Interviewee 1).

The smaller institution, it seems, was keen to create a merger of equals, to ensure equality and parity of esteem during the process and to avoid being ‘taken over’. It perceived the larger institution as being arrogant during negotiations, and of being disrespectful towards its achievements. One interviewee commented that one of the agreed preconditions for merger negotiations was that “it would be on the basis of equality” (Alliance B, Interviewee 1) and that “there would be a neutral headquarters” (Alliance B, Interviewee 1). This was of significant importance to the smaller institution, who felt that the larger institution was, at times being disrespectful and simply wanted to take it over under sufferance, as an out-centre, and as a means of getting university designation. Interviewees suggested that “the plan was to tag us on to something just on the step to becoming a real university” (Alliance B, Interviewee 4), and that “it wasn’t a David and Goliath, but the other college would never admit that” (Alliance B, Interviewee 4). The interviewee continued

“one of the very first meetings we ever had with (the other institution), and it wasn’t me in the meeting, they actually did say that we would be a feeder college. They actually used that term. I mean it was so disrespectful” (Alliance B, Interviewee 4).

The larger institution, on the other hand, had been seeking university status for some time, and felt that, within the smaller institution,

“there was a slight inferiority complex that made them argue all the time for 50-50 on everything, even though any sort of factual look at them would have dictated that the balance would have been somewhat different” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5).

Interviewees reported feeling that they were essentially already at university level and were being as accommodating as possible to the other partner, which refused to accept

that it was the smaller of the two and that this needed to be taken into account. One interviewee commented

“there was a sense that they were bending over backwards to accommodate some of the [smaller institution] people - particularly in the area of research, they felt they were bending over backwards to sing up the praises of [the smaller institution] in certain areas in order that there would be balance in whatever came forward...there was always a kind of a hidden nervousness about that and it was glossed over really. And I think the narrative of disrespect and you know, just because ye are the bigger partner doesn't mean you can bully us, this type of thing, which was kind of the language that was coming back, particularly over the last year or so, really manifested that sense of discomfort on the part of [the smaller institution], on my analysis of it, with the fact that it is factually the smaller college, you know” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5).

These power plays permeated the entire process and manifested themselves in a variety of ways. The partners were willing to use, as one interviewee commented, “whatever power you can get a hold of” (Alliance B, Interviewee 2). The larger partner focused on exerting ‘academic’ power, making arguments about research and the academic credentials, while the smaller partner appears to have relied on the fact that it was gaining ground in terms of size and scale on the larger institution, and was physically positioned in a better location, demographically. There was an unwillingness to acknowledge each other's strengths or for the partners to be open and honest and identify their own weaknesses. There were also efforts by the partners to undermine each other by attempting to expose and exploit perceived weaknesses to exert strength and enhance positioning. Interviewees reported numerous instances of negative commentary, both formal and informal, which were unhelpful and hurtful and which inhibited the process. Another outcome of this was that during the entire process, there was a failure by the Alliance to agree on a data set for metrics and attempts to agree governance and management structures, particularly in relation to the location of the headquarters of the new institutions. This posed enormous difficulties for the process and were never resolved. All of these issues must be addressed if the Alliance is to move forward.

5.3.4.7 Role of External Consultants & Facilitators

A number of external consultants and facilitators were appointed to the Alliance during the process to date. Interviewees commented that these served a number of functions, including providing expertise and knowledge not available within the organisation, and acting as facilitators between the two when the process ran into difficulty. Interviewees spoke of the need for these external consultants to be credible, respected, experienced and knowledgeable. One commented “well there are two things you are looking for with something like that. You are looking for public credibility and you are looking for genuine experience to bring” (Alliance B, Interviewee 1). Another interviewee suggested that consultants were also being used to 'do the dirty work' or as 'scapegoats' for the partners during the process, who were looking for a 'way out', stating that “the experts were of use but in a situation where there isn't a high degree of trust they were also maybe scapegoats to a certain degree and contributed to the distrust” (Alliance B, Interviewee 2).

An interesting feature of this case is that a number of consultants and facilitators were appointed externally, by relevant Government Ministers. However, this was not welcomed by all, who saw this as further evidence of political interference with the process and felt that some of the appointees were unsuitable. One commented

“then of course the Ministers brought in a new Chair. We suddenly got a phone call to tell us that this person was coming in and this person, without any reference to us, had already put all of this other stuff in place – so that was a really bad start. A hugely bad start” (Alliance B, Interviewee 4).

Another commented

“The Chairman who was brought in... was a political appointment in some regards as he was identified by one of the senior politicians as being someone suitable for the job. He came in with sort of - well he appeared to have an agenda - but in reality he probably didn't, he was a straightforward enough character, but he came in from an industrial background and he didn't pick up on the nuances of the HE sector and he subsequently departed when there was a fallout” (Alliance B, Interviewee 1).

One interviewee recalled a conversation he had with a senior political advisor after IoT 2 had withdrawn from the process, and the Minister subsequently appointed a consultant to draw up a report on the viability of the process. He stated

“I said to him after [IoT 2] pulled out "listen - you are like the Monty Python sketch - you're the salesman trying to tell the punter that the parrot is still alive when everybody knows the parrot is dead. How many more salesmen are you going to send?" (Alliance B, Interviewee 7).

5.3.4.8 Lack of Commitment, Belief & Passion

While a number of interviewees expressed their individual commitment to the merger and re-designation, there was a perceived wider lack of commitment to, belief in and passion for the project. While one interviewee commented “I do believe in this project, I really do, and I think it is crazy, anything else” (Alliance B, Interviewee 4), the majority appeared to be of a different opinion, citing “a lack of belief in the process” (Alliance B, Interviewee 1) and “there was no enthusiasm for it” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7).

Others commented on the lack of commitment, stating “there was never really a commitment to make something happen you know, and maybe at the end of the day, there was never any real commitment to merger” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5). He continued “we never committed...neither party committed” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5), attributing this to the fact that the parties were “being really pushed through a process that very clearly from very early on they were uncomfortable with” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5) and that “because of a failure to really engage honestly with one another, as we were immensely capable of doing, there was always this sense that the commitment wasn't there to make it happen” (Alliance B, Interviewee 5).

This lack of belief, commitment and passion for the project has had an inhibitory effect on the process to date, with one interviewee commenting “you can't force people who don't want to come together...you cannot drag them through it” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7).

5.3.4.9 Leadership & Charisma

As discussed earlier, there was a significant amount of distrust between the President and the Senior Executive Team within one of the partner IoTs, and this has had

a very negative impact on the merger process. One interviewee commented that the President “never really got the trust of the management and certainly never got the trust of either the unions or the academic staff” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7).

There was also a considerable amount of disruption and instability during the process due to changes in leadership. Since the beginning of the process IoT 1 has seen two Presidents and two Governing Body Chairs, and IoT 2 has had four different Presidents and three Governing Body Chairs, with another due to be appointed shortly. One interviewee noted

“there was constant changing and chopping of people in leadership positions that hadn’t had long term credibility built up in the organisation so it is much more difficult to deal with people who are in there a relatively short term, with doubters, you know, you don’t have the same credibility” (Alliance B, Interviewee 1).

This undoubtedly caused difficulties for the Alliance and made it difficult to establish strong working relationships during the project.

Interviewees also reported a failure by leadership to bring the academy on board. One commented “they weren’t bringing the communities with them” (Alliance B, Interviewee 7) and another “in terms of actually making it an exciting discourse and journey for the academics in both organisations, I think they were treated as staff as opposed to academics and I think that’s a very poor way to set up a university because your academy is stronger ultimately than your President” (Alliance B, Interviewee 6).

This has undoubtedly contributed to the IR issues which have now emerged with the academics trade union in both institutions.

5.3.4.10 Cultural Issues, Values and Identity

Finally, the data suggests that perceived differences in culture, values and identity has played an inhibitory role in the progress of this Alliance to date. Interviewees spoke of perceived cultural differences between the two institutions, arising from their individual histories, values, and geographical identity. The interviewee stated

“I suppose culture is a difficult concept to get hold of in the first place. But the history of where we have got to, that determines the culture to some degree and I think that [IoT 2’s] history in terms of pushing for a university and in terms of believing and they have been very successful in getting their staff to believe they

are of university status/standing and to believe that and that's reflected I think in terms of their perception of many things. [IoT 1] have had a different pathway there. They would not have seen the university as being such a driving force for them early on. Now it's changed as we went along. The big difference is that [IoT 1] has been more tightly managed, maybe some would say too tightly managed, so therefore there is less room for error with that but also there might have been a greater sense of control and maybe a narrower focus on certain things. [IoT2] is the other extreme where there certainly hasn't been that type of management and in fact there is evidence that is probably quite loose, maybe even unregulated management there, and that reflects itself in terms of the way things are done, in terms of say staffing levels, teaching time, etc. It goes right through and people sense that in the background and it creates difficulties" (Alliance B, Interviewee 2).

Other interviewees cited the fact that the two IoTs were at different phases of their life cycle or on different trajectories as contributing to cultural differences. These perceived cultural differences have caused some to question whether the partners are suitable to merge with each other. One interviewee commented "they wouldn't have been natural bedfellows" (Alliance B, Interviewee 2) and another that "you can see other likeminded colleges out there that this could be much more possible with" (Alliance B, Interviewee 4).

There also appears to have been a failure to investigate or interrogate cultural issues at an early stage in the process. Interviewees commented

"we could have been exposed to each other more in terms of the work we were involved in, in terms of understanding each other's culture, having an appreciation of what we are good at and not so good at. And also, I mean there are a lot of misconceptions or looking at the other organisation and putting certain labels on what they are doing and we need to break through all that and it didn't happen, that could have happened early on" (Alliance B, Interviewee 3).

These perceived cultural issues must now be addressed by the Alliance if it is to move forward successfully.

5.3.5 Conclusion & Recommendations

From the above, it is clear that there are a number of key factors which are perceived as having inhibited the progress of this Alliance through the merger and re-designation process, and a relatively small number which appear to have facilitated it. These are summarised below:

Key Facilitatory Factors

- At System Level
 - Input and support of key political actors.
 - Facilitators appointed by the relevant Minister to get the process back on track after the withdrawal of one of the partners.
- Institutional Level
 - Appointment of a number of external consultants and facilitators to inform and guide the Alliance during the process to date.

Key Inhibitory Factors

- At System Level
 - Unwarranted levels of political interference, disruption and ‘playing politics’ with the merger process.
 - Unrealistic expectations from politicians and the Government in relation to the merger process.
 - ‘Hands off’, disinterested approach from both HEA & Department.
 - Perceived lack of understanding by the HEA, and its failure to prioritise the merger project.
 - Failure of HEA to provide clarity around the process and criteria for re-designation.
 - Failure of the Department/Government to enact the necessary legislation.
 - Failure of HEA/Department to provide necessary funding mechanisms.
 - Unsuitable, politically appointed consultants/ facilitators.
- At Institutional Level
 - Relationship characterised by distrust, hostility, resentment, suspicion and paranoia between the partner institutions.
 - Institutional leaders ‘playing along’ with the politicians and the Department, not wanting to be seen to be ‘dragging their heels’.

- Failure by the leader of one of the institutions in particular to get the Senior Executive on board leading, to both covert and overt resistance to the merger.
- 'Tribalism' and posturing for position, particularly at joint meetings of the executive teams.
- Diversionary and delaying tactics employed by the partners.
- Power plays between the two partner institutions with both seeking to establish as much bargaining power as possible when it came to negotiations, including:
 - Difficulty creating a 'merger of equals' and parity of esteem.
 - Unwillingness to acknowledge each other's strengths or for the partners to identify their own weaknesses.
 - Efforts by the partners to undermine each other (including negative and hurtful commentary) by attempting to expose and exploit perceived weaknesses to exert strength and enhance positioning.
 - Failure to agree on a data set for metrics.
 - Failure to agree governance and management structures, particularly in relation to the location of the headquarters of the new institution.
- Historic relationship between the partners – no history of collaboration and the relationship was often strained and competitive.
- Lack of commitment to, belief in and passion for the project.
- Distrust of the leader in one of the partner IoTs by management and the academy.
- Disruption and instability during the process due to changes in leadership.
- Failure by leadership to bring the academy on board and IR issues.
- Perceived cultural differences and failure to investigate or interrogate perceived cultural issues at an early stage in the process.

It is evident from the above the majority of the inhibitory factors in this case to date are internal, and are within the gift of the institutions themselves to resolve. Therefore, a number of key recommendations for this Alliance are summarised below:

- Firstly, if both partners are truly committed to the process, trust needs to be established. To this end, the partners should:

- Acknowledge the past difficulties which the Alliance has faced and agree to move forward in a constructive manner, leaving these behind.
 - Start with small projects to gain confidence and get ‘easy wins’.
 - Establish a pre-agreed dispute resolution mechanism/process, such as an external or joint mediator, and avoid airing any further disputes in public, as this undermines the process.
 - Establish a variety of approaches and venues, both formal and informal, for regular communication and encourage and develop multi-layer points of sustained contact, which cascade through all levels of the institutions.
 - Focus on building strong relationships based on respect, honesty and understanding between key actors in both institutions.
- Leaders in both institutions need to ensure that all members of their Senior Executive Teams are supportive of the process and will work towards achieving the goal of TU designation. If not, their input into and impact on the process should be minimised.
 - Early agreement on governance and management structures for the new institution, including the location of its headquarters, will be key, as will agreement on a combined data set/metrics, and a due diligence process.
 - The partners must be open and honest with each other in negotiations. They should acknowledge each other’s strengths and be honest about their respective weaknesses vis-à-vis the criteria.
 - Perceived cultural differences between the organisations and their different histories and trajectories should be acknowledged, and misconceptions about each other’s institution need to be addressed and corrected.
 - The €1.6 million funding which has been recently secured from the HEA should be used to put together a strong project team, consisting of senior people from both organisations who have demonstrated commitment to and passion for the project, and who are likely to work well together.
 - The Alliance should consider bringing some ‘fresh’ faces into the project steering group and implementation teams, both to re-energise and re-invigorate the process, and also to avoid emotional and physical fatigue on the part of those who have been involved over the past 5 years.

- The leaders in both institutions have a significant body of work to do to get the academic staff on board, particularly given the public and hurtful nature of some of the commentary to date. They need to focus on communicating with, consulting and engaging staff with the project. In addition, the Alliance must continue to work to address the IR issues which have arisen. Ideally, this should be facilitated at national/system level, as similar issues arise in all of the Alliances.
- To this end, and also to address other system level inhibitors, the Alliance should form a coalition with other Alliances of IoTs who are merging to lobby at system level for legislation, funding and facilitation mechanisms.

5.4 Alliance C

5.4.1 Introduction

This case study examines the proposed merger between three Irish IoTs who initially came together to form an Alliance to seek TU designation in 2011. Although the partners have yet to merge, this Alliance is widely perceived as being the furthest along the path to merger and re-designation. This case study examines the background and context to this Alliance, the particular facilitatory and inhibitory factors which are perceived to have shaped its journey on the path to merger and re-designation, along with a conclusion and recommendations for the Alliance.

5.4.2 Background & Context

This Alliance was formed following publication of the *National Strategy for Higher Education* in January 2011, when three existing IoTs, located within a relatively small, but highly populated geographical region, came together to merge and jointly seek designation as a new TU. After some preliminary discussions, a formal alliance was created in October 2011 and since then the three IoTs have been working together to develop a programme of work which will culminate in the submission of a joint application for designation as a TU. The three partners are briefly described below.

IoT 1 is Ireland's largest IoT, and with a student community of 22,000 students and staff. It is widely viewed as the sectoral leader. In 2014, it was ranked in the top 100 universities globally under 50 years old. It can trace its origins back to the development of technological education in Ireland in the late 19th century, originally consisting of a variety of colleges which were renowned as centers of excellence in their field, spread over a number of city centre locations. In 1992, it was constituted as one single institution and was designated as an IoT, albeit under a different legislative framework than the other IoTs. It offers a full range of programmes and services across all the main discipline areas up to and including PhD level, and has a strong record in technology transfer, enterprise creation and applied research. Approximately 50 per cent of its students come from outside the city and county in which it is situated, which is unusual in the IoT sector. It is currently in the process of moving all of its disparate campuses into one new unitary campus in the city, at an estimated cost of €550 million, and has received significant State support for this venture.

IoT 2 is located in the North West the same city. Established in 1999, it is Ireland's youngest IoT. It has a relatively small student and staff population, comprising approximately 3500 full and part time students. It currently offers a range of applied and career focused programmes in a range of discipline areas from level 6 to level 9 of the NFQ. However, it currently does not offer any programmes at doctoral level (level 10). Its mission has focused on making education accessible to a diversity of learners and it is well established within its community, from which most of its students are drawn

IoT 3 is located in South West of the city, and again, is a relatively new Institution, having been established in 1992. It currently has a student and staff population of approximately 4,000, with 32% of its students studying part-time, making it one of the sectoral leaders for flexible and part time provision. It offers programmes across a range of subjects from levels 6 to 9 of the NFQ. Like IoT 2, it does not offer programmes of study at doctoral level. Also like IoT 2, it has a strong reputation for facilitating access to higher education from those groups traditionally under-represented in the sector, and the majority of its student population derives from the local community. Table 19 below provides a summary of the key feature of Alliance C.

Table 19: Alliance C - Key Points

| Alliance C– Key Points | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Number of Partner IoTs | Three |
| Relative locations | All located within one large city |
| Historical Context | One long standing partner, with two newer partners. Little history of collaboration. |
| Size and Scale | Significant difference in size and scale – one very large partner with two considerably smaller partners |
| Academic Programme Offerings | Broadly similar programme profile, but only the larger partner offers Doctoral/Level 10 programmes |
| Ethos/Missions | The two smaller IoTs have strong ties to their local communities, from which most of their students come. Larger institution more nationally and globally focused |
| Entry | The two smaller IoTs typically attract students with lower |

| | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| requirements | CAO/Entry points than the larger IoT |
| Projected combined student numbers (as per published HEA enrolment figures 2014/15) | 28,150 students |

5.4.3 Progress to Date

Following the creation of the Alliance in October 2011, a high-level Steering Group was established to guide the three institutions towards the goal of TU designation. This group consisted of an independent Chair, and the Presidents of the three partner IoTs. Additionally, a ‘TU Support Team’, consisting of staff from all three partners (with the majority from IoT1), and a Project Coordinator, was put in place to co-ordinate the various strands of the overall implementation plan, and to facilitate the change process required to create a the new TU. This was in contrast to other Alliances who did not commit any full time staff to the project at that stage.

An expression of interest was submitted to the HEA in July 2012, as per Stage One of the TU process, and, although the HEA in its documentation had indicated that it would advise the institutions within a reasonable period (no longer than six months) as to whether or not the proposal could proceed to the next stage, this did not occur (for reasons already alluded to earlier) until May 2013, some 10 months later, when the HEA published its *Completing the Landscape Process for Irish Higher Education* document, acknowledging receipt of the formal expression of interest from the Alliance and indicating that the proposal could proceed to Stage Two.

The Alliance then began work on Stage Two of the process – ‘Preparation of a Business Plan to Meet Criteria’. This involved the preparation of a detailed plan by the Alliance to address how it proposed to meet the criteria for a TU, along with the process requirements and timelines. The Alliance relied heavily on external consultants to assist them with the process, and the consultants were highly influential in steering the Alliance through the various stages. Seven specific working groups were established, centered around key foundation themes which were identified by the Alliance during the preparation of the Stage One submission. Each of the thematic areas were led by an individual from one of the three partner IoTs and were supported by a number of working groups which focused on drafting, editing, merger planning, communications,

governance, organisational design, academic matters, the first year experience and a safe space working group.

In early May 2014 the Alliance submitted its 'Business Plan to Meet the Criteria' to the HEA, and as per Stage Three of designated process, the plan was subjected to scrutiny and review by an external international expert panel. The panel visit took place in September 2014, and ran concurrently with Alliance A's Stage Three review. The International Panel found that the Alliance was likely to meet the criteria for designation as a TU within the proposed timeframe, and that it had the capacity to achieve the objectives of consolidation, subject to a number of considerations. The report commended the Alliance for its record of having begun to 'act as one' and said that the commitment and energy of senior leaders was palpable. It also commended the Alliance for its understanding of the importance of managing the cultural dimension of the merger process as well as the structural considerations, for its engagement with the local region and international collaborators, the establishment of a joint Graduate Research School and the range of joint activities already in place.

The International Panel recommended that a number of issues be followed up on, and advised that these would be subject to review at Stage Four of the process. Some of these recommendations echoed those made to Alliance A. The Panel recommended that the Alliance carry out further reflection on the distinctive role and mission of the proposed new TU and how governance and management systems could best deliver on that mission. In relation to funding, they recommended that the Alliance have regard to potential sources of non-exchequer funding, such as co-funding from industry and research funding, and that it should consider conducting a risk analysis on its costing and underpinning financial plan. They also recommended that the Alliance stress test and conduct a sensitivity analysis on student number projections, and that it have regard to both the resource implications of recruiting staff with the appropriate qualifications and sustained research activity required to meet the TU criteria.

The Alliance had originally set a date of August 2015 for merger, with the expectation that by summer 2016, TU designation would have been secured. However, despite the fact that it successfully completed Stage Three in September 2014, this has not been possible, and the Alliance is effectively stalled, due to a number of key inhibitory factors, most notably IR issues, and the absence of enabling legislation. These are discussed in further detail below.

5.4.4 Key Factors Impacting upon Merger and Re-designation Process

The data gathered and analysed has highlighted the following key issues and factors are perceived as having impacted upon the progress of Alliance C through the merger and re-designation process. These are summarised in Table 20 and discussed in detail below.

Table 20: Key Factors Impacting upon Process - Alliance C

| Alliance C – Key Factors | References in Interview data | Sources |
|--|------------------------------|---------|
| Uncertainty, Insecurity, Fear & Frustration | 48 | 4 |
| Communicating with Staff & IR Issues | 43 | 4 |
| Relationships between Key People | 30 | 4 |
| The Political Landscape | 28 | 4 |
| Trust, Honesty & Understanding | 27 | 4 |
| Cultural Issues, Values & Identity | 22 | 3 |
| Power Dynamics and Negotiations between Merging Institutions | 21 | 4 |
| Lack Government, HEA & Department Support Commitment, Understanding & Clarity | 20 | 4 |
| Leadership & Charisma | 18 | 4 |
| Building and Maintaining Momentum & Stability | 15 | 4 |

5.4.4.1 Uncertainty, Insecurity, Fear and Frustration

The data suggest that feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, fear and frustration have impacted negatively upon the merger process in the Alliance to date. Interviewees reported that there is a significant degree of uncertainty, which surrounds both the merger and re-designation process and outcome. Indeed, they also reported uncertainty surrounding the very nature of what the new TU should and will be. In relation to the prescribed process, interviewees commented on the uncertainties surrounding TU designation and the fear that the institutions have about merging but not securing TU status. One commented “this merge before you're designated, mentally and emotionally and everything is a huge problem and in theory, you can get stuck in this black hole of

Calcutta that goes on forever” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4). This interviewee commented on the uncertainty around the nature of a TU, stating there is “a lack of clarity as to what this TU is - you buy an iPad - you know what you're getting - you know the feeling - that it's the experience, you're buying into” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4), and that this uncertainty around mission was unhelpful to the process. In particular, the failure to provide legislation has created uncertainty as regards the timeline for the process and staff contracts, terms and conditions. One interviewee commented “obviously it's the uncertainty around - will we - won't we - have the legislation” (Alliance C, Interviewee 2). Another stated

“there's been different interpretations as to when the pistol is starting...it's a bit like - the best way I can say it to you is that there is a train in Heuston Station going to Cork. We just don't know whether it's 10.10 or 11.10, but there's a train there and we're supposed to be on it” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1).

Interviewees also reported that there was a heightened sense of uncertainty and fear due to a lack of communication with staff in the respective partner institutes. One commented

“I think what you would see is that the greatest reluctance probably is down to the fact that there hasn't been the level of hand holding and communication that is required to re-assure people that even though there's no information, don't fill that vacuum with fear” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1).

Another stated “I think that what is being stored up is probably a very big fear” (Alliance C, Interviewee 2).

Interviewees reported feeling apprehensive about the merger itself, with one commenting “suddenly there are ‘oh crap moments’, as you realise this is going to happen” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4). Interviewees from the smaller partners also expressed the fear of losing their identity, autonomy, and regional remit. One interviewee commented “if you listen to people in the TUI, who are doing the most talking about the fear factor, they're talking about losing the local presence and regional remit” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1).

The Alliance needs to take steps to ensure that as many of these uncertainties, fears and insecurities are addressed as possible before the next formal stage of the process.

5.4.4.2 Communicating with Staff and IR Issues

As alluded to above, it appears that there is a significant degree of apprehension, uncertainty and fear in relation to the merger from staff in the partner institutions. This is partly attributable to the perceived lack of communication, engagement and consultation with staff, which all interviewees commented on. One interviewee acknowledged

“that one of the fundamental weaknesses of what we've done, to date, has been the fact that we have not engaged with most of the staff associated with what we're doing” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3).

Some referenced the fact that there appeared to be a “code of secrecy” (Alliance C, Interviewee 2) around plans, with one commenting “information is kept at the top and there's a dearth of information at middle management from what I'm told and at general staff level” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1). Others commented that those at the top have not engaged staff at ground level within the institutions, with one commenting “my concern might be that they are a little removed from what is the mood on the ground and they may get it wrong, but I hope not” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3). Interviewees were all in agreement with the fact that this would have to change, with one commenting “I think the point is that it is very, very important that from now on that everybody knows what's going on and everybody's told” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1).

This lack of communication was referred to by one interviewee as a “vacuum which has now been filled with fear” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1) by the trade unions, and has resulted in very significant trade union resistance and IR issues with the merger. One interviewee noted

“I think there are many academics who would rather have an academic contract that they understand and can manage, rather than the fear and uncertainty - rather than the uncertainty of an academic contract that still has to be described, within a future TU state, so that uncertainty can be used to kind of - if you like - fix people and have them not necessarily shouting for a new future” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3).

These IR issues now pose a serious threat to the progress of the merger and must be resolved if the Alliance is to progress.

5.4.4.3 Relationships between Key People

One of the key factors which interviewees perceived as having contributed to the relatively successful progress of this Alliance to date is the development of strong interpersonal relationships between key people in the Alliance. Interviewees particularly stressed the importance of strong personal relationships between the Presidents of the three partner IoTs, based on trust, respect and parity of esteem. One interviewee commented

“so if you like there are multiple layers in the relationship building that goes on, but I think once the President's sat down and built that solid relationship, it sort of gave a validity to the informal networks that had existed prior to the fact” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1).

Interviewees commented that while the three Presidents have dramatically different in personalities “the collection of the three current ones is a very powerful collection for multiple reasons” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4), noting that they are a critical team whose personalities and strengths complement each other, and that there is “a warmth - they get on - you can tell they get on” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4). The interviewee also commented

“they need to know each other well enough to know their children's names and their birthdays and this kind of carry on. They have to know each other well. They need to be able to say 'are you for real', without going into a huff...there has to be a huge trust among them” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

Building these personal relationships clearly took time, and one interviewee suggested that it was easier because three, rather than two, individuals were involved. The interviewee stated

“at President level, I think there was some initial getting to know you and the usual kind of jockeying but funny enough, the dynamic around three or four is very different from the dynamic around two. Two are almost directly competing, three are more of a community and certainly four is an even bigger community. It may be a bit more fragmented but it's actually easier to build dynamic and I found, in terms of levels of trust very early on” (Alliance C, Interviewee 2).

In addition to strong interpersonal relationships at leadership level, the Alliance has also succeeded in building strong personal relationships between others working on the merger project. This is perhaps attributable to the fact that a single TU office was established and that people were seconded from their former roles to work full time on the project. One interviewee commented that “the relevant people in the three organisations know each other very well - have a good strong working relationships - so that's working quite well” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3) and another added “what worked well was how we got to know each other” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4), reporting that they would feel comfortable in each other’s institutions or boardrooms, and that “there is no question that we all know each other an awful lot better” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4). That interviewee stated that the Alliance chose an

“engaging participative approach to figuring out how we want to shape the TU and we have layered that down through multiple layers of the organisation, starting with the Senior Managers and we got to the point of knowing each other and knowing each other's first names and knowing our children's names and things like that and it went from there down to the Heads of School, who have hundreds of people and down into the Heads of Function and their staff” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4),

although this opinion is not necessarily echoed by others in the Alliance, who feel that engagement outside of the leaders and the core project team has been unsatisfactory.

These strong relationships were not built overnight however, and one interviewee commented that it “took a lot of work” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3). Another added

“there would have been minor bumps. I think, really, why they're minor bumps, is that certainly, if I look at the support team that we have here, we're all very, very different in terms of our personality profiles and backgrounds, but I think there's a sufficiently cohesive degree that we're working towards a common purpose” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1).

In fact, ensuring that the project team is working towards a common goal and that the members of the team focus on the greater good is a key facilitatory factor. One interviewee likened the process to changing the team you support. He commented

“so the way I looked at it was - I took off the (Individual IoT) jersey and put on a TU jersey and that metaphor actually became important, because we would have

had a number of team meetings in this room where we asked 'what does it mean and what are we doing' and I would have said, the issue of the metaphor of 'what jersey are you wearing' came up and for the most part, people said that they wearing a TU jersey” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3).

However, allegiance to the new TU was not, it appears, universal across the all members of the team. As one interviewee commented

“we are not the land of the lotus eaters either...what has become clear to me, despite what might be said, but in terms of facts on the ground, is that some people never took their jerseys off. They simply put on TU jersey's over their own jersey, and so their own jerseys were always closer to their heart” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3).

Recently there has been a change in leadership in one of the partner IoTs and the TU project coordinator has also changed, as have some members of the TU support team. While this may be beneficial in terms of freshening up the merger team and perhaps reinvigorating the process, the Alliance must ensure that the new team continues to develop and maintain strong personal relationships and dynamics based on honesty, openness and trust, if the merger process is ultimately to be successful.

5.4.4.4.The Political Landscape

The Irish political landscape is another key factor which is perceived as having impacted upon the merger process in this Alliance. In particular, interviewees commended the political support which the partners had received during the process to date. One commented

“I mean to say any and all political involvement has always been positive. I mean, just about every possible Minister has come in and proclaimed their support for what we're doing” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3).

Another stated

“the role of the Minister is absolutely critical. On several occasions over the last number of years, I and several others - off line - would have said to the Minister directly 'you have no idea how important it is for you to grunt positively in public about this, not for the public, but for our own staff'- that they have to believe there's political will behind it” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

In contrast to Alliance B, this political support has been well received by the partners, most likely because it aligns with the partner institutions real ambitions. One interviewee recalled a conversation with a relevant Senior Government Minister in relation to the merger process, and particularly his concerns about merging but not being re-designated as a TU, stating

“I can remember, as clear as day in the Gresham Hotel one day, in this meeting with (a Senior Government Minister) at the time, and we were having this conversation and the bottom line on this issue if we could get stuck in the black hole, (the Senior Government Minister) said as clear as day 'you don't mess with us - we won't miss with ye', so the political intention was not to get anyone stuck in the black hole” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

One would have to question the wisdom of this sort of an approach to TU designation. However, it does illustrate just how political the Irish process is and how supportive this particular Minister was of the Alliance. Since that time, there has been a change of government, and this of course brings with it political uncertainties for the Alliance. Nonetheless, the political support it has received to date has certainly been a facilitatory factor.

5.4.4.5 Trust, Honesty and Understanding

Interviewees from this Alliance spoke of the levels of trust, openness and honesty which existed between the partner institutions as being a perceived facilitatory factor to the process. Most interviewees attributed this to the fact that the three Presidents had a formed a trusting and honest relationship, and this then set the tone for the rest of the key members of the Alliance. One interviewee commented

“the need to engage honestly is very, very important and the need to make decisions and not to play cute and you know, some people might say - being open and honest is naive, but at the end of the day if there isn't that level of disclosure, there won't be that level of confidence in the process” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1).

One example of the level of trust which has been established is in relation to due diligence, which this Alliance has yet to complete, although it is at an advanced stage of the process. When asked about this, one interviewee commented

“if you're about building trust, the wrong place to start is to say ‘by the way - we're going to run a big check on you first to make sure that you're a suitable bed partner’” and continued “if you're trying to go back to your language of inhibitory and facilitatory - to my mind, facilitatory is ‘yes - let's trust each other for now and at a point in time, we're going to have to check out a few things’ - to the extent that we haven't already exchanged information between us” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

This is in direct contrast to the approaches to due diligence taken in the other two Alliances. Alliance A has already completed its due diligence, and in Alliance B, the partners fell out over the need for and process for completion of due diligence. Certainly the partners in Alliance C seem willing to place a considerable amount of trust in each other and the process, and this has facilitated their progress to date.

5.4.4.6 Cultural Issues, Values and Identity

As would be expected given the profiles of the partner institutions, significant perceived cultural differences have arisen during the merger process, particularly between the two smaller IoTs and their much larger partner. The two smaller IoTs, as one interviewee noted, are

“twinned in mind, body and soul. They were the last two Colleges to be established. They were new. They weren't re-named RTC's. So (IoT 3) was established in 1992 or 1993. 10 Years later, (IoT 2) was established here. The very first day (IoT 2) was established, all the staff were on the payroll in (IoT 3) as (IoT 2) didn't have a payroll. Large numbers of staff went over and back. It just feels like - I'm in a different building - it could be the same college. The geographic draw is roughly the same, so those two colleges never had a problem with each other and would often work together and would complement each other. We were in two different locations, but I would suspect are as similar in philosophy and spirit as any two colleges you could pick out in the country” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

The interviewee stated that the two smaller institutions see themselves as being “much more responsive/re-active...participating in the employment creation initiatives, engaging with the springboards, the accelerated technician programmes and all those type of new initiatives” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

In contrast, the larger institution is seen by the two smaller partners as being extremely hierarchical, more formal, slower to make decisions and less responsive to the industry and the community. One interviewee commented “even the management structure, I think, you know a porter here would talk to the President, but I don't know if that would happen here to the same extent in [the larger institution]” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1). Another interviewee commented that the larger institution is seen as being “in many ways, similar, much more similar to a traditional university” and as portraying “an aura of being ‘superior’ (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

These cultural differences have certainly caused difficulties for the Alliance. One interviewee commented that

“the culture between those two (smaller IoTs) and the hierarchy involved in getting a decision made in (the larger institution) has led us to huge issues - so that culture and the lack of clear mission would probably be the biggest difficulties” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1).

However, the cultural differences have not been insurmountable, with interviewees suggesting that when you look a bit deeper and get to know each other better, people are not all that different. One stated “when you got in under the hub and the propaganda, the people were very similar”, adding

“so again as we got to meet the layer down - the Heads of School and what they call Assistant Heads of School - Heads of Department, those type of people would be very similar and we would have had a lot of commonality. We're all on the same contract of employment. We're all on the same arrangement with the Department, so from a structural point of view, we were quite similar, so even from though optically, the organisation might have felt differently, actually - at an operational level -very similar, and again when we started to engage, get the exams office people - they could be living in the same world, because they have the exact same issues and the exact same concerns” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

Indeed, there appears to be a strong commitment from the partners to create a new culture, which was commended by the International Panel. One interviewee stated “this whole endeavor is not [to] merge three institutes, we actually want to transform ourselves” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4) and this will be key to the success of the whole project.

5.4.4.7 Power Dynamics and Negotiations between Merging Institutions

Given the particular constitution of this Alliance, with two small and one very large partner, it is not surprising that as one interviewee stated “there will be the suspicion that the larger organisation will gobble up the smaller organisation...the worry I think, always in a merger situation is that the core always takes from the periphery” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1). Clearly the two smaller partners have real concerns about losing autonomy and power and being 'taken over' or 'swallowed up' by the larger partner. One interviewee stated

“one of the metaphors that has been trotted out and it's an interesting one and probably not a bad one, is that what we're trying to do is a bit like the Irish breakfast where the hens are involved but the pig is committed. And so you know the (two smaller IoTs) are committed because they go away - if you want to say - in that they're dissolved into (the larger institution) to use the language of the Bill, whereas (the larger institution) is involved because it will still stay as it is, so in that sense, you could say it's easier for (the larger institution) because it doesn't really have to do anything” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3).

Such fear is certainly legitimate in this Alliance due to the fact that under the proposed legislation, merger will mean that both of the smaller partner IoTs will be dissolved and have their powers and functions transferred to the larger partner. This is in contrast to the other two Alliances which would see all partner institutions dissolved and a new entity formed at the point of merger. This has naturally heightened fears about loss of autonomy and being 'taken over', although interviewees pointed out that this was done as the larger institution has full awarding powers of its own under a different legislative framework than the other IoTs, so it made sense to hold onto that. However, interviewees noted that this had come at a cost, with one commenting

“the flaw in all of that was that by keeping [the larger partner] alive it made a very unbalanced see-saw for the conversation...if I had my time back again, I would do differently. I would probably have put the three of them out of business...As I said there were unintended consequences from an emotional and power play of that little technical detail” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

The interviewee suggested that perhaps the two smaller partners should have merged first so that they would not have been such “a trivial player”, stating

“if I had my time over again, I might have merged the two similar ones first and then went in with a harder bargaining position to the other partner for negotiation purposes, being wise after the event, but you could never have imagined that you would need to do that” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

Certainly there were and are tensions around the negotiations in relation to the power and size imbalance of the partner institutions. The smaller institutions want to resist being perceived as a feeder college for the ‘real university’ so equality of purpose is important to them. An interviewee from one of the smaller partner IoTs reported that

“there was an assumed establishment, where we'd all just suck in under the structures of [the larger IoT] and we said 'stop the lights - not necessarily - only if it suits us' and that caused huge disruption and other than that, it would have been a 'hostile takeover'. We said ‘no - hang on now, this isn't a takeover - we're going to re-invent ourselves to meet the student's needs - now that we have a bigger resource’” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

Another noted

“because we didn't have a crisis that was driving this, we had no natural decision maker or we weren't prepared to accept that the biggest fellow makes the decisions” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3).

The two smaller institutions were also keen to ensure that the management and governance structures of the new TU is representative of and fair to all three partners. One interviewee commented

“it would be important that there is an executive structure for the university ultimately that requires a presence in (the two smaller IoTs), so that they are not perceived to be peripheral or outliers and that everything is sucked into (the larger institution) and I think the Steering Group have been aware of this” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1).

On the other hand, an interviewee from the larger IoT reports that they feel they have to be accommodating to a disproportionate extent to ensure that the smaller partners are represented and assured. He commented

“I think, because they're the smaller partner, they probably feel that they have the greatest to lose, and therefore they needed to have a far greater say in what was actually happening in the developments associated with it, so they set out to do that” (Alliance C, Interviewee 2).

Yet despite, or perhaps even because of this power imbalance, the Alliance has managed to progress through the process to date with these issues in hand.

5.4.4.8 Lack of Government, HEA and Department Support, Commitment, Understanding & Clarity

In contrast to the other two Alliances, the majority of interviewees reported that they felt the HEA and the Department, had in general, been supportive of the process to date, with one key exception in relation to the failure to enact the necessary legislation. Members of this Alliance did not appear to have met with the same level of apathy, disinterest or even resistance to their proposal from the HEA, with interviewees commenting “the HEA, in short have been very supportive” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4) and “I would think that the Department are supportive” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1). Another stated “there are people in the HEA who have been positive and constructive. I certainly don't think they have ever thrown any wobbles or [put] any road blocks in front of what we're doing, at all” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3).

However, a key perceived inhibitory factor to the process has been the failure of government to enact the necessary legislation to allow the partners to merge. This has caused enormous difficulties for the partners, who cannot set a date for merger or merge until the legislation is in place. One commented

“the delay in the legislation has hugely affected us. This exercise should have taken two years max, and it does not get easier and it does not get better by being dragged out. We're going four years now and it's still no end in sight. That is laughable from a commercial business perspective” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

This delay has led to questions being raised of the commitment of government to the process. One interviewee stated

“I suppose the one thing that you might say is that ‘Hunt’ issued January 2011 - 5 years on, we don't have the legislation, so there is a legitimate question there, with regard to commitment...the Government didn't give us the legislation is the single criticism that I would have had” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3).

The delay in enacting the legislation has also led to questioning about whether the merger will actually go ahead. One interviewee stated

“the legislation is a major motivator. It tells you this is going to happen and I think not having it, makes it harder to actually get real work done. If I look at everything that we've done and achieved to date, an awful lot of it is planning, an awful lot of it is aspirational, but because the legislation isn't there” (Alliance C, Interviewee 2).

Another commented

“I do believe that people work to deadlines. We need to know what our target date for merger is. I understand, actually, and have sympathy with, the fact that because the legislation hasn't been adopted, the Steering Group are very reluctant to state now what their goal is, with respect to a date for merger, but it would make it an awful lot better” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3).

The sense of frustration and annoyance at the legislation not been passed is palpable within this Alliance. One interviewee likened the uncertainty in this regard to “waiting for Godot but Godot never showed - you know - he never showed up” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1).

5.4.4.9 Leadership & Charisma

Another key perceived facilitatory factor for this Alliance has been the commitment of its leaders to the merger project, which has been consistently strong throughout the process. One interviewee commented “I think the resolve from the top - good strong leadership from the top and no dithering, no ‘will we - won't we?’ It was from [strong] the very beginning. I think there was a resolve there that travelled out” (Alliance C, Interviewee 2).

Another interviewee commented that “nobody questions the commitment of the Presidents to what we're trying to do. That's fundamentally important” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3) and “the one thing I would say is the strong commitment on the part of the three Presidents to collaborating and getting closer, was an important positive contributor to that as well” (Alliance C, Interviewee 3).

In addition to the commitment of the Presidents, the commitment of the Project Chair was also referenced by interviewees, who felt that his support had been fundamental to progressing the project.

Finally, interviewees spoke of ‘champions’ within the Alliance who demonstrated leadership in relation to the project and who have helped to facilitate the process. One interviewee commented

“when I look at some of the key people - there have been some great champions among the group of people that got involved in this...there are some great people involved in the leadership piece of that - some of those champions have been a real positive influence on the whole process” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

The work of these individuals has facilitated the progress of the Alliance through the process to date.

5.4.4.10 Building and Maintaining Momentum & Stability

Not surprisingly, this Alliance has found it difficult to build and maintain momentum throughout the process, and this has been perceived as being problematic. One interviewee illustrated this point, commenting

“we were physically not able to [merge] because we have no legislation. We were meant to merge last September. We had psyched everyone up by the time they went home last June that we had all the stuff done, so we could be merged by September, and they had [psyched themselves up]. By May, clearly we were not getting legislation and we're saying like ‘finish the work lads - finish the work’ and they did and they went home. The whole thing was stopped, but it's much harder to get the wheels’ spinning the second time than to keep it spinning” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4).

Another comment “ye've had the same issue with on again/off again – ‘for God's sake lads - this is a joke. If it was that important, how did it take you this long to get your acts together’, so the longer it goes on, the less credible this process is” (Alliance C, Interviewee 4). The failure to enact the necessary legislation has also provided time and space for opposing trade unions to rally the troops.

Some interviewees feel that the loss in momentum has led to a decline in enthusiasm for the project. One commented “I would say I have seen in the last year, a decline in enthusiasm” (Alliance C, Interviewee 1). Another stated “the challenge is to keep enthusiasm going so I think it’s, can we keep the charge of enthusiasm going long enough for the investment pipe line to flow again - I think is actually the challenge”

(Alliance C, Interviewee 2). There is clearly a danger for the Alliance here which needs to be addressed.

5.4.5 Conclusion & Recommendations

From the above, it is possible to identify a number of key factors, arising both at institutional and system level, which are perceived as having either facilitated or inhibited the progress of this Alliance through the merger and re-designation process. These are summarised below:

Key Facilitatory Factors

- At System Level
 - Support from successive key political actors.
 - Generally supportive approach from HEA & Department.
- At Institutional Level:
 - High levels of trust, openness and honesty between the partner institutions.
 - Establishment of strong formal and informal relationships between key people in both institutions, both at leadership level and between those working on the TU project.
 - Creation of a single TU office at an early stage in the process and commitment by the partner IoTs to providing the necessary human resources to the project.
 - Commitment from the partners to transform and create a new culture for the new institution.
 - Strong committed leaders (Presidents and Project Chair) who have driven the project.
 - Champions within the Alliance who demonstrated leadership in relation to the project and who have helped to facilitate the process.

Key Inhibitory Factors

- At System Level
 - Failure of government to enact necessary legislation and the resultant uncertainty regarding process, timelines for merger, staffing concerns, etc.

- Failure of HEA to provide funding mechanisms.
- At Institutional Level
 - Feelings of uncertainty, fear, frustration and insecurity in relation to the merger process and outcome.
 - Uncertainty surrounding the mission and the very nature of what the new TU should and will be.
 - Failure to engage staff to a sufficient extent in the process, which has led to a significant degree of apprehension, uncertainty and fear in relation to the merger and considerable IR issues.
 - Cultural differences between the two small institutions and its large partner.
 - Concerns of smaller institutions about power imbalance, the possibility of losing identity or autonomy and being ‘swallowed up’.
 - Inability to build and maintain momentum throughout the process and resultant loss of momentum and enthusiasm for the project.

There is a real danger that if these inhibitory factors are not addressed soon, enthusiasm will wane and the project may falter. Consequently, there are a number of actions which I suggest the Alliance should take to further progress the merger and re-designation process. These are summarised below:

- Reconsider the distinctiveness and relevance of the proposed mission and vision for the new TU, in line with the International Panel’s recommendations. Clarity around mission, vision and purpose will help to address and alleviate some of the uncertainties and fears which currently exist.
- Continue to work to address the IR issues. Ideally, this should be facilitated at national/system level, as similar issues arise in all of the Alliances. However, at institutional level, the Alliances need to focus on communicating with, consulting and engaging staff with the project, as this has been perceived as being a weakness with the process.
- Form a coalition with other Alliances of IoTs who are merging to lobby at system level for legislation, funding and facilitation mechanisms.
- Set a date for merger and work to that date, despite the lack of legislation. This will allow the Alliance re-build momentum, gain confidence and put increasing

pressure on system level actors to resolve issues at their end. It should also assist in re-generating enthusiasm for the project, which has waned.

- Secure and commit the necessary financial resources to the project and seek alternative sources of funding to address any shortfall in exchequer funding, as per the International Panel recommendation.
- Take active steps to continue to develop and maintain strong working relationships, particularly between the new staff who have recently been brought in to work on the project.
- Address the specific concerns of the smaller partners to ensure negotiations run relatively smoothly. Agreement on the governance and management structure is key to this and should be secured as soon as possible. Another option would be to consider an integration agreement, such as Alliance A utilised.

6. CROSS CASE ANALYSIS, FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents cross-case analysis and discussion of the data. Firstly, a comparative analysis is presented, both to identify similarities, which would be expected at system level, and differences, which may be more prevalent at an institutional level, between the individual case studies. This facilitates the identification of the key factors, both facilitatory and inhibitory, which are perceived to be impacting upon the process in the Irish context

Secondly, a cumulative cross case analysis is presented, which analyses the data set in its entirety and therefrom proposes a broad framework or classification around which the full range of relevant factors can be positioned and conceptualised.

6.2 Comparative Cross Case Findings & Analysis

The within case analysis of each of the three Alliances provides evidence of a complex interplay of both system and institutional level factors at work within each case. The key factors or themes identified by participants as relevant to each Alliance are summarised in comparative form in Table 21 below.

As would be expected, certain key themes are common to all three Alliances, and others are shared across two. There is quite a degree of commonality between Alliance A and C, both of whom have made relatively steady progress. As could be expected, Alliance B, which has encountered significant difficulties during the process, has got the greatest number of unique key themes. This is useful as it allows me to identify and ring-fence those factors which are potentially attributable to the break-down in negotiations between the partners, although it must be stated that all of the key themes identified are shared to some extent across all three Alliances.

Each key theme is discussed in further detail below, with reference to the relevant literature or theoretical framework to explain the findings. It is important to note that these are not intended to be hierarchical in nature, but rather are all interlinked and related to each other, and have impacted upon the process to different degrees in different Alliances.

Table 21: Comparative View of Key Factors emerging from each Case

| Key Factor | Alliance A | Alliance B | Alliance C |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Lack of Government HEA & Department Support, Commitment, Understanding & Clarity | X | X | X |
| Power Dynamics and Negotiations between Merging Institutions | X | X | X |
| Trust, Honesty & Understanding | X | | X |
| Relationships between Key People | X | | X |
| Communicating with Staff & IR Issues | X | | X |
| Uncertainty, Insecurity, Fear & Frustration | X | | X |
| Building and Maintaining Momentum & Stability | X | | X |
| Leadership & Charisma | | X | X |
| The Political landscape | | X | X |
| Cultural Issues, Values & Identity | | X | X |
| Role of External Consultants & Facilitators | X | X | |
| Distrust, Hostility, Resentment & Suspicion | | X | |
| Securing the Support of the Senior Management Team | | X | |
| Blocking, Delaying Tactics and Game Playing | | X | |
| Lack of Commitment, Belief & Planning | | | |
| Resources | X | | |
| Project Planning | X | | |

6.2.1 Lack of Government, HEA & Department Support, Commitment, Understanding & Clarity

Certain key themes are common across all three cases. The first and most prevalent of these is the perceived lack of Government, HEA and Department support, commitment, understanding and clarity. This is perhaps unsurprising as they are system level actors, so commonality across all three Alliances would be expected. Both Davies (2013) and Harman and Harman (2003) identified the crucial role government plays in

facilitating the collaboration and merger planning and implementation process through a variety of factors, many of which are clearly absent in the Irish context. This research provides evidence that there was a perceived failure at system level to:

- Provide certainty and clarity on the overall desired shape of the Irish HE system before inviting proposals to merge from IoTs
- Provide certainty and clarity on the model/paradigm, nature and role of a TU within the Irish system along with a failure to demonstrate an understanding of the necessary system or institutional boundary conditions required
- Provide certainty and clarity regarding the process, stages, timeline or criteria required for re-designation
- Enact the necessary legislation
- Provide necessary or appropriate funding mechanisms
- Provide system level advice, support or facilitation mechanisms for merging IoTs
- Provide clarity on contentious issues, such as staffing and IR matters

The data strongly supports the proposition that all three Alliances perceive these system level factors as inhibitory. Indeed, the absence of legislation is not only inhibitory, but is absolutely preventative in nature. The alignment of the merger requirement with the creation of TUs has created additional confusion and dissatisfaction within the sector.

With regard to Davies (2013) continuum of government/agency positioning on collaborations and mergers, adopted from Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1976) model the Irish government/government agencies approach to merger and re-designation is clearly closer to the 'Tells and Sells' end of the continuum, than it is to the 'delegates' end of the spectrum. System level actors decreed not only the process, as would be expected, but also left the individual IoTs with little real choice about who to merge with. Therefore, even though the mergers are being sold as voluntary, in reality the IoTs had no choice but to merge to become a TU, and little to no real choice regarding partner choice.

As discussed earlier, this 'Tells and Sells' approach has historically been the approach taken to the Irish IoT sector, and has inhibited and slowed development in the sector in the past. This research provides evidence that it is perceived to be continuing to do so. It is interesting to note that both Alliances A and B perceived that the HEA took a hands off, disinterested, unsupportive stance in relation to the merger and re-designation

process. Interviewees from both Alliances questioned the agenda of the HEA and even questioned if it was aligning itself to national policy. Alliance C, on the other hand, felt that the HEA and the Department had been generally supportive. This is an interesting finding, particularly as Alliance C has been the most successful to date, and also the Alliance which reported the most positive political support for the merger. In fact, the lack of system level support reported by Alliances A and C have led them to question the motives and real agenda of the HEA, and has also led to questioning about whether or not there is any real alignment at system level between those tasked with the formulation of national HE policy, strategy and its implementation.

6.2.2 Power Dynamics and Negotiations between Merging Institutions

Although the existing literature on HE mergers is relatively silent on this factor, it is perceived as critical in the Irish context. All three cases provide ample evidence of the key role which power dynamics are perceived to play in the negotiations between partner institutions, with factors such as relative partner size, academic reputation or success or political connections being used to exert or gain bargaining power or strength by one partner over the other. All cases show evidence of the smaller partners fear of being swallowed up or taken over, their fear of loss of autonomy and of losing their regional remit. Smaller partners within the Alliances were keen to establish parity or equality of esteem, respect for achievements, equal representation on groups, committees, etc., and were keen to secure a fair share of senior posts in the new institution. Larger partners, on the other hand, felt that the smaller partners were acting out their insecurities and that as a result, the larger partners were making more concessions than might be justified by an objective look at both institutions. Alliance A took positive steps in the form of an integration agreement to help address these issues and this appears to have facilitated the progress of that Alliance. Within Alliance B, on the other hand, the partners ended up in a public dispute where both attempted to undermine perceived strengths and exploit perceived weaknesses of the other. The data gathered from Alliance B also supports the proposition that the closer the partners are in size, the more difficult the negotiation and merger process may be.

In relation to the number of partners within an Alliance, conflicting opinions arose. Within Alliance B, interviewees felt that it was easier to plan a merger with two partners, rather than three, supporting the proposition by Harman & Harman (2003) and Kyvik & Stensaker (2013) that mergers between two partners are easier to manage than

those between multiple partners. However, within Alliance C, interviewees, particularly from the smaller Alliance, felt that having three partners was easier, as it gave the two smaller partners greater collective strength vis-a-vis their larger partner.

Clearly then, these power dynamics, if not managed carefully, have the potential to drag any prospective merger negotiations down, and this research suggests that they are much more influential than the existing HE merger literature acknowledges. To this end, agreement at as early a stage as possible in negotiations about the name, governance and management structures, location of headquarters and positioning of senior posts within the new institution, along with other post-merger integration issues, appears to be critical for success. It also appears to be important to ensure that smaller partners are equally represented and respected during the negotiations process, and that there is a pre-agreed dispute resolution mechanism for the disputes which, it appears, will inevitably arise.

6.2.3 Trust, Honesty & Understanding

All three cases illustrate the absolute need to build, establish and maintain trust, honesty and understanding between the partners. This echoes findings by Mohr and Spekman (1994), Cullen et al. (2000), Abodor (2005), Kale and Singh (2009), Brown et al (2004) and Curry J (2013) in relation to the importance of inter-organisational trust in mergers and collaborations. Both Alliances A and C, who have made relatively good progress despite the system level inhibitors, reported that the establishment of trust, openness, honesty, understanding and even frankness between the partners was a key facilitatory factor in the process, and has enabled the partners to get through difficulties which arose during the process. This is despite the fact that there was no real history of collaboration between the partners before this current process. The partners in Alliance B on the other hand clearly failed to establish trust, honesty or understanding. In fact, data from that Alliance is an excellent example not only of the absence of trust, but of active distrust, hostility, suspicion and resentment caused by a number of factors, including a history of a competitive relationship, perceived differences in cultures, values and trajectories, changes in key personnel and poor working relationships between key-people. It not only demonstrates distrust at an inter-organisational and interpersonal level, but also at an intra-organisational level, where there appeared to be enormous distrust of one of the leaders within his own organisation. This was perceived as being a major inhibitory factor for that Alliance.

This research strongly suggests that inter-organisational, intra-organisational and interpersonal trust between key actors is a *sine qua non* for a successful merger process. While the absence of a history of successful collaboration between the partners is not detrimental, an acrimonious history between the two may be, unless specifically acknowledged and addressed. Huxham and Vangen (2005) recommend the use of their trust building loop, which focuses on aiming for realistic and successful outcomes (which are initially modest), and using this as a base for reinforcing trusting attitudes and gaining underpinnings for more ambitious collaborations. It also identifies the need for the partners to trust each other initially, to be willing to be vulnerable and take a risk, while acknowledging that the partners form expectations about the future of the collaboration based on reputation or past behaviours or contracts and agreements. This could be used as a model for future partner institutions who wish to undergo a merger process.

6.2.4 Relationships between Key People

The findings from all three cases highlight the importance of establishing strong formal and informal relationships between key people in the partner institutions. Both Alliances A and C seem to have succeeded in building up strong working relationships based on trust and honesty between both the Presidents and other key people within the partner institutions and this has contributed to the success of progress made to date. Interviewees commented on the need for strong personal chemistry and a positive dynamic between the Presidents and of the need for key staff working on the project to get along with each other. Interviewees suggested that early agreement about the futures of the Presidents in these Alliances, both of which notably involved one partner which is significantly larger than the other(s), also helped. This supports findings by Brown et al (2004) and HEFCE (2010) who identified that early agreement on the position of the two heads of institution post-merger is an important issue.

In contrast there were serious difficulties within Alliance B in establishing strong working relationships, due to a number of factors, including the fact that there were a considerable number of changes in leadership, both at President and Chair of Governing Body level, within the institutions during the course of the merger process. There was also a failure to agree at an early stage about the futures of the Presidents. The lack of strong personal relationships at any senior level across the two partner organisations is a perceived inhibitor to the progress of Alliance B. The implication from this is that strong relationships between the key people in the merging institutions are perceived as being

critical to the success of the merger process, and the absence of these can lead to serious difficulties.

6.2.5 Leadership and Charisma

The data from both Alliance B and C highlight the importance of strong, committed leadership within merging institutions. Leaders must be willing and able to take ownership of the process and drive it forward, even in the face of the likely resistance from some within the ranks. This supports the findings of Brown et al (2004) on the importance of strong leadership. Leaders in the merging institutions must also be able to influence, gain the support of, and if necessary, manipulate others in the organisation, to secure the success of the project. They need to use formal and informal networks of ‘champions’ across all levels of the institution. Alliance C is a good example of a case where strong leadership has been evident and leaders have committed to and pushed on with the merger project. In contrast, difficulties with leadership in Alliance B, particularly the failure of a leader to bring the Senior Executive team and wider organisation on board, has caused significant difficulties for that Alliance. It is clear that if the necessary leadership in any of the partner institutions is lacking, the project is likely to falter.

6.2.6 The Political Landscape

Another system level, macro-political factor which has played a key role in the process is the Irish political landscape, and particularly the political support for, or as some would see it political interference in, the process. This is a factor which has not been previously identified in HE literature, and perhaps this is not surprising, given the autonomous nature of most HEIs. Irish HEIs however, are a different animal. As outlined earlier, since their establishment they have been tightly controlled by the DoES, and more recently, the HEA, in an extraordinarily tight, steering-from-centre approach, operating under inflexible financial, staffing and legislative frameworks. Their regional remit has made them attractive propositions for politicians who want to be seen to be supportive of their region and many of the members of their Governing Bodies, including the Chairs, are political appointees. It is maybe then not surprising that there has been a strong political influence.

Alliances B and C provide contrasting cases in point. Within Alliance C, political support was welcomed and perceived as positive and facilitatory towards the process. In Alliance B, which was the only Alliance specifically mentioned in the *Programme for*

Government 2011-2016, interviewees felt that there had been an unwarranted degree of political interference with the process, that politicians were ‘playing politics’ and that there was political misunderstanding and dishonesty, which had been unhelpful to the process. Such a reaction would support the propositions made by Harman & Meek (2002) and Thompson (2012) that considerable external pressure or force to effect a merger is often not helpful to the process and that if a proposed merger is forced, and one or both of the parties rejects the idea or benefits of merging, the merger process can become very arduous and laborious (Thompson, 2012). Certainly there seems to have been an inordinate amount of political wrangling in relation to this Alliance, including for example, the statement in the Programme for Government, various Ministers appointing chairpersons, facilitators, consultants, etc., and meetings between the institutions and the Minister when the process became unstable.

These political factors, along with the perceived lack of HEA and Department understanding, commitment, support and clarity, demonstrate the critical role that macro-political system level factors play can play in the merger process.

6.2.7 Communicating with Staff & IR Issues

Findings from both Alliances A and C highlight the need to ensure that staff, both administrative and academic are consulted during and engaged with the merger process at all stages. Cartwright, Tytherleigh and Robertson (2007), Harman (2010) and Brown et al (2004) all highlight the importance of consulting and involving staff, who may be concerned about their job security. Such consultation, they stress, must be genuine and be reflected in the subsequent merger process to avoid heightening negativity towards the merger process. Harman (2000) recommends that to facilitate the process, guarantees be given as soon as possible in the process to staff about security of employment, where feasible. In the Irish context, this has not happened for a number of reasons. For example, Alliance A was reluctant to commit resources to the project or to engage staff to any real extent until they knew if it was feasible and indeed, likely. However, by the time they realised that the project was a real possibility, the information vacuum they had created had been filled “*by fear*” with the unions, who had time in the interim to build opposition to the merger. This opposition was bolstered by the fact that as the legislation has not yet been approved, it is difficult for the Irish Alliances to give guarantees to staff, beyond that they will not be made redundant or have their salary reduced. Perhaps it is surprising in an international context that such reassurances have not appeased the concerns of staff,

but a variety of contextual issues, such as the economic downturn with resultant salary cuts and additional workload, and the premium placed on certainty and security by many staff in the sector, have led to growing disquiet and industrial action being threatened by the academic trade unions, who have effectively blocked the process at a national level for the past 18 months, severely inhibiting the progress of all of three Alliances. The perceived difficulty in communicating a vision for a new TU to staff and to selling the potential benefits of it to them, along with an aura of secrecy around the project in some of the Alliances, is certainly contributing to IR difficulties and a failure to get ‘buy in’ from staff. The obvious implication here is that, as the literature suggests, early regular communication, consultation and engagement with staff is critical to the success of the process and that a failure to do this is likely to result in difficulties further along the line.

6.2.8 Feelings of Uncertainty, Insecurity, Fear & Frustration

Interviewees from both Alliances A and C expressed feelings of fear, insecurity, frustration and uncertainty around the merger process. Both of these Alliances had completed Stage Three of the process, yet were extremely anxious around aspects of the process and possible outcome, frustrated with the lack of progress and enabling mechanisms, and afraid of the unknown. It seems that the closer the Alliance gets to the merger becoming a reality, the more apprehensive or fearful people become, as the possible becomes probable and real. It is notable that interviewees from Alliance B were not as anxious or fearful about the outcome, likely because it looks as if a merger is not on the cards in that Alliance for some time.

Merging institutions, therefore, must be cognisant of and acknowledge these emotions, and address them where and when possible. While communication at an early stage in the process is important, what is equally as important is that communication is ‘ramped up’ as the process develops, to help allay concerns and fears which naturally arise.

6.2.9 Cultural Issues, Values & Identity

Issues surrounding culture, values and identity were prevalent across all three Alliances, and were highlighted in particular in both Alliances B and C. Both of these Alliances consisted of larger IoTs who had been pursuing University designation for some time, and indeed had previously submitted applications for same, and their smaller partners who had not necessarily been on that trajectory. This gave rise to perceived cultural differences between the partners. In addition, Alliances B and C appeared have

some member IoTs who were very explicitly values led organisations, and whose partners did not necessarily share those same values. This led to culture clashes and implies that values led HEIs may be more difficult to merge, due to a strong allegiance to existing institutional culture and values. This supports propositions by Harman (2002) and Harman and Harman (2003), who identified the powerful influence which culture has in some merger situations, and Buono and Bowditch (1989), who found that the ‘thicker’ the culture and the greater the degree of shared beliefs and values within an organisation, the more potent the influence of that culture will be.

6.2.10 Building & Maintaining Momentum & Stability

Harman and Harman (2003) propose that mergers work best if institutions that have agreed to merge can move as quickly as possible to merger implementation. They argue that long delays increase anxiety levels and give opponents increased time to plot against the merger and can ultimately lead to the demise of the process. Research by Brown et al (2004) echoes this and found the shorter the time scale between the decision to merge and the legal implementation of that decision, the better, as it reduces the chances of unforeseen changes in key people, limits time for opposition to gain momentum and minimises the chances of external changes undermining the proposal. In the Irish context, it is difficult to imagine how things could have been done any slower. Since the publication of the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DoES, 2011), which first mooted the possibility of merger and the creation of TUs, almost six years have passed without any merger, let alone re-designation, having taken place. By any international standards or benchmark, this is unacceptably slow and has led to a variety of problems, which the case studies clearly demonstrate.

At almost every stage throughout the process to date, there have been difficulties and delays. The data from both Alliance A and C provides evidence of the stop/start nature of the process due to a number of factors, including delay on the part of the HEA and other system level actors, particularly in relation to the lack of necessary legislation, IR issues and the failure to invest the necessary human resources to support the project. These delays have made it very difficult to build any real momentum and have allowed unions and other objectors to build support. It has also led many to become sceptical of the process and to question if it will ever happen. Delay has also led to frustration, stress and burnout amongst those working directly on the merger and re-designation process. Alliance C in particular, which initially made the strongest progress, has found that

enthusiasm for the project has waned due to the delays and failure to generate momentum.

In relation to stability in the process, Alliance B provides numerous examples of both external and internal factors which created an extremely unstable process which undermined confidence of both staff and stakeholders. These factors include, but are not limited to changes in key personnel, a number of extraordinary external events, such as a Statutory Inspection of one of the IoTs, and overt distrust between the partners.

6.2.11 Role of External Consultants & Facilitators

Brown et al (2004) found that external change agents or brokers, who have no vested interest or commitment to either institution, may facilitate the merger process, although there is little empirical evidence in the HE literature to date on this point. However, case studies A and B both provide examples of the key role which external appointees can play during the merger process. Consultants or facilitators are appointed by the partner institutions either individually or collectively to provide confidence and comfort both internally and externally, and to gain access to knowledge and expertise not readily available within the Institution. Both Alliances provided evidence that each partner IoT brought its own external consultant(s) to negotiations, to represent and protect the institutions interest, and to counterbalance consultants which had already been appointed by their partner. All Alliances also appointed an independent external chair. It should be noted that all external consultants, whether chairs or not, potentially act as significant change agents during the merger process.

External consultants and facilitators have acted as project chairs across all three Alliances. They generally work to steer the process by monitoring and maintaining progress, ensuring deadlines are met and quite often, facilitating conflict resolution. These external chairs are generally perceived as being objective and neutral when it comes to dealing with contentious issues between the partners and may suggest ways through bottlenecks, etc. In essence, they act as mediators, both formally and informally, and both between the partners themselves and between the partners and other external stakeholders and system level actors. The level of HE expertise amongst these chairs varied across the three Alliances, and those with no HE experience tended not to get involved in substantive matters, leaving that instead to other appointed HE consultants and project team members. It is of course crucial that the external change agent appointed

has the necessary skill set to be of real benefit to the process. Otherwise, the external change agent might inhibit, rather than facilitate the merger.

The second category of external change agent are external consultants who bring to the project significant experience and expertise in HE, mergers, multi-campus HEIs, organisational structure, change management, research strategy, HR, etc. They are appointed by the institutions as ‘content’ experts, and are called upon when necessary to provide advice and opinions and to assist in drafting policy or discussion papers, proposals and other documentation, including the preparation of formal submissions. Of course, they may also act in a conciliatory fashion between the partners from time to time. It is interesting to note that there was a suggestion within Alliance B that external consultants can sometimes be used as ‘scapegoats’ or to undertake tasks or have conversations which for whatever reason, the individuals within the institution may find unpalatable or politically difficult.

Whatever role the external change agent assumes, this research has found it is questions of perceived authority and legitimacy are crucial, as is independence of action and judgement. Examples emerged of consultants appointed by politicians who failed to secure buy in from the partners, consultants who were perceived as taking one partners side over the others, and consultants being used as scapegoats during the process. Unsurprisingly, such actions only serve to undermine, rather than support, the merger process.

6.2.12 Blocking, Delaying Tactics and ‘Game Playing’

Alliance B provides evidence of the sort of covert tactics which can and are used by institutions and/or individuals who may not be fully committed to the success of the project. The existing HE literature does not specifically identify these factors, yet they were perceived as having played a significant inhibitory role in Alliance B, where interviewees reported that some individuals used blocking, delaying tactics and ‘game playing’ to delay the process. Interviewees also suggested that some parties were giving the impression to external stakeholders, particularly the government and key politicians that they were committed to the process, but were using underhand tactics to stall and block the process. This led to a failure to make any real process.

6.2.13 Lack of Commitment, Belief & Passion

The data analysed from Alliance B highlights the fact that there was a perceived lack of commitment to, belief in and passion for the process, if not from all then certainly

from a sizeable number of participants. Again little attention has been paid to this in the literature, as perhaps it is assumed that those responsible for leading and working on such projects will be committed to the process. This lack of commitment, belief or passion did not arise as a key factor in Alliances A or C. Perhaps the lack of belief within Alliance B may be attributable to the fact that some within the Alliance felt that their hands were tied by political actors who had mandated that the possibility of merger and the creation of a TU between the IoTs be put into the Programme for Government, and therefore the impetus for the initiative did not come from the institutions themselves. Other interviewees noted that the partners would not have been natural bedfellows and that perhaps other more suitable partners might have been sought had the Programme for Government commitment not been made. As a result some felt that the merger was going to happen with or without their cooperation, and this led to a lack of commitment and passion and a failure to take ownership of the process. In addition, one of the partners in this Alliance had been pursuing designation as a traditional university on its own for some time, and found the concept of a TU which could only be formed by merger difficult to buy into or truly believe in. A comparative examination of the data across all three cases in relation to this factor supports the proposition that a lack of belief, commitment or passion is a distinct inhibitory factor.

6.2.14 Resources

This issue of resources, or perceived lack thereof, arose most strongly in Alliance A, although it was also mentioned as being an issue across the other two Alliances. The literature suggests that a significant amount of financial and human resources are required for successful mergers, and that the non-availability of such funding or additional resources can be a significant inhibitory factor to the process (Brown et al, 2004). This has been identified by interviewees as an inhibitory factor, particularly in Alliance A, which has felt starved of resources both at system and institutional level. This is in contrast to Alliance C, which invested more heavily into the project, although arguably it had greater resources at its disposal

The fact that the merger and re-designation process in Ireland was first mooted at a time of an unprecedented economic crisis in the State is not insignificant, with many suggesting that it was designed to be a cost saving measure which would rationalise the sector. Trying to effect a successful merger and create an internationally benchmarked TU against a backdrop of extremely limited resources is certainly challenging, if not

almost impossible, and one would have to question the wisdom of policy makers in this regard. Brown et al (2004) warn that HEIs, or indeed governments, may see mergers as a way of quickly reducing costs and that institutions themselves may be tempted use cost saving arguments to strengthen the business case. Indeed, one of the factors which the Stage Three International Panel picked up upon was the lack of funding mechanisms and the proposed costings submitted by the Alliances, which it advised they reconsider. The bottom line here is that mergers cost money in both the short and medium term, and the case studies illustrate the difficulties faced when the necessary funding is not available.

6.2.15 Conclusion

By undertaking a comparative analysis of the data across the cases, it has been possible to identify key system and institutional level factors which are impacting upon the process in the Irish context, and provide some empirical contextual evidence about the varying ways these factors can arise and interplay with each-other.

6.3 Cumulative Cross Case Findings & Analysis

6.3.1 Introduction

Following the comparative analysis of the within case data, I conducted a broad, cumulative cross-case thematic analysis, which analysed the data set in its entirety. This was conducted in an inductive manner, using the theoretical frameworks identified from the literature as a loose guide for the analysis.

My analysis firstly identified all of the various factors perceived by participants as impacting upon the process across the cases. I then placed these factors into wider groups or categories, at a broader conceptual level than that which exists in HE literature base at present. Thus a broad framework or classification around which the full range of factors found across the cases can be positioned, conceptualised and explained was developed. This framework is outlined in Figure 10, and consists of five key categories of factors, which are discussed in further detail below. Table 22 below presents details of the prevalence of each of these five themes or categories across the entire data set.

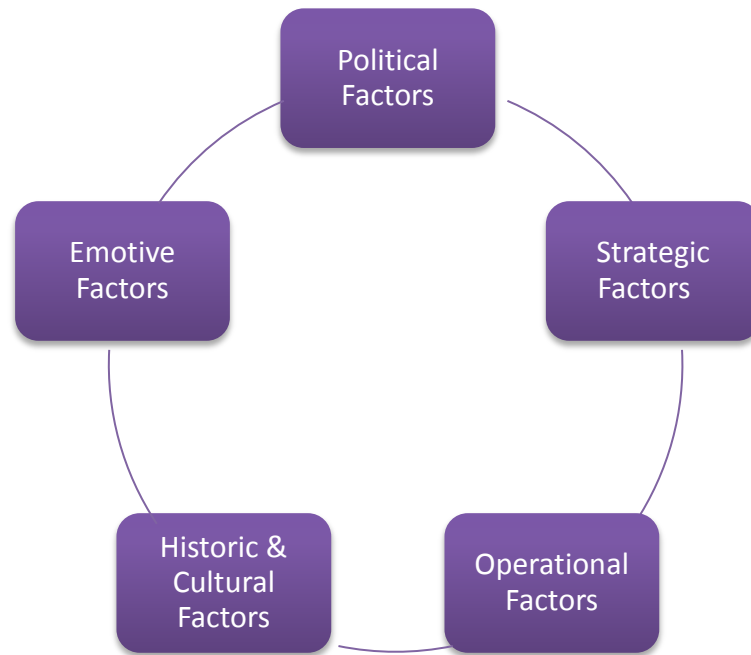


Figure 10: Proposed Framework of Key Factors impacting Upon the Merger Process in Higher Education

Table 22: Prevalence of Key Factors across Data Set

| Category | References in Data Set | Number of Sources |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Political Factors | 699 | 18 |
| Operational Factors | 562 | 18 |
| Emotive Factors | 390 | 18 |
| Strategic Factors | 332 | 18 |
| Historic & Cultural Factors | 206 | 18 |

6.3.2 Political Factors

The data suggests that the merger process in Irish HE is perceived as being highly political in nature, with both macro and micro political factors having a significant impact on the process. In fact, political factors were the most prevalent grouping within

the data set, which emphasises the critical role that both system level and institutional politics has played in the process. This is an interesting finding, given that the existing literature on HE mergers has not placed such a key emphasis on the politics of merger as these case studies suggest is the case in the Irish context. This finding supports Davies (1985) proposition that there are numerous factors which reinforce and interplay with each-other both within and outside the HE system which make rational, planned policy formation and implementation difficult. He states that policy formation in HEIs is inevitably a political process and centres on the disposition of power, the capacity to control key organisational influences and the use of levers or incentives for the fulfilment of particular preferences. Certainly this is reflective of the case in the Irish context, and is a point to which I will later return.

Macro Political Factors

At macro-political level, the participants identified the following key factors as impacting upon the merger process:

- A lack of Government/Department or HEA commitment, support and clarity;
- The Irish Political Landscape
- Opposition from Traditional Universities
- Support and pressure from regional stakeholders.

Many of the issues which arise in relation to the perceived lack of support, commitment, understanding and clarity from the Government, Department of Education & Skills and the HEA, which interviewees across all Alliances felt had hindered their progress, have already been discussed. In particular, the failure to enact the necessary legislation and to provide certainty and clarity on the process and criteria are key inhibitory factors, as is the failure to provide the necessary funding, advice and support mechanisms for institutions. Many interviewees felt that there was inconsistency in behaviour and a ‘hands-off’, disinterested approach from the HEA and the Department of Education & Skills, with many questioning if they actually wanted the policy to be implemented at all. There certainly appears to be a perceived lack of alignment at system level between policy makers and implementers, and this is causing difficulties for all three Alliances.

The second key macro political factor identified as important to the process is the Irish political landscape. The data highlighted the important role that political support or ‘push’ has played in the process, including the specific Programme for Government

Commitment given in 2011. Some interviewees commented on the fact that the notion of a TU in the Irish context is itself a political solution to a politically problematic series of bids for university status which had been made by a number of IoTs in the recent past. The data identified the critical role that key political actors played in driving forward the merger and TU process, particularly senior politicians who have allegiances to a particular region. However, these were not always seen as helpful, with many interviewees accusing politicians of interference, of causing disruption in the HE system, playing politics with HE and trying to control the IoT sector. While the data suggests that political support was initially perceived as strong, at least in some quarters, this has declined due to a relatively uncertain Irish political landscape, which has seen changes in a number of key political positions and actors in recent times. Some interviewees reported that they now felt there is political apathy towards the project, and that this was related to a general failure of the political system to prioritise HE in Ireland. Others felt that the politicians and the Irish government had unrealistic expectations of what could be achieved and that institutional leaders were at times simply playing along with politicians, and that they didn't want to be seen to be dragging their heels with them, as ultimately they control the purse strings.

Other key macro political factors perceived as impacting upon the process included opposition from existing 'traditional' Irish universities, who had lobbied against the creation of TUs, amid fears of reduced funding and increased competition, and finally, support and pressure for the merger and re-designation projects, which has come from local and regional stakeholders.

Micro Political Factors

At a micro-political level, a range of themes emerged from the data, including:

- The role of power dynamics and negotiations between merging institutions
- The importance of strong, credible, charismatic and committed leaders and stability in leadership
- The need to develop strong formal and informal relationships between key people in the merging institutions
- The need to secure the support of the Senior Executive team, and the wider academy and institutional staff

- The need to avoid blocking and delaying tactics, and ‘game playing’ between institutions

In particular, the key role of power dynamics and negotiations between merging institutions featured strongly, with factors such as differences in academic reputation or trajectory or differences in partner size being used to gain bargaining positioning. Smaller partners expressed concern about losing autonomy or being ‘swallowed up’ by a larger partner, and cited perceived arrogance or superiority on the part of the larger institution. Data from interviewees from larger institutions indicates that they sometimes perceive the smaller institution to be acting defensively or with an inferiority complex, while partners of relatively equal size spoke of difficulties around creating a purported merger of equals. Certainly, there is a significant amount of intra-institutional power play involved in the merger process, with merging institutions fighting for bargaining power and representation, and using either academic reputation or strength or size as a bargaining tool. Some appear to have adopted a strategy which also manifests in a perceived unwillingness to acknowledge partners strengths or to acknowledge its own weakness, and seizing upon purported weaknesses of its partner(s) in order to strengthen its bargaining position. This supports the proposition by Harman and Harman (2003) that mergers which are presented as consolidations, which is the case here due to the ‘voluntary’ nature of the process, are often more laborious, costly and inefficient. At an individual level, interviewees also reported individual power plays and self-promotion as being an inhibitory feature of the process.

The data also highlighted the importance of strong, credible, charismatic and committed leaders, and builds on the work of Brown et al (2004) in this regard. The data indicates that leaders must be perceived as being loyal to their organisation, must have the ability to secure the support of the Senior Executive Team, and be able to influence, and if necessary, incentivise or manipulate others in the organisation to achieve their goal. Leaders must be politically astute and use political power and networks across their organisation to get staff on board, particularly given the rather non-hierarchical nature of HEIs. The use of ‘spies’ and ‘champions’ in the organisation is one way of doing this. Leaders must also be willing to identify and side-line or remove problematic people at senior level who are in opposition to the merger. The leader must be able to ‘sell’ the merger to the academy and wider staff and where necessary, tailor the message to suit the particular audience. Stability in leadership is also key, and Alliance B provides an

excellent example of case where instability in leadership has had a critical impact upon the process.

Also at a micro political level, the need to develop strong formal and informal relationships between key people in the merging institutions was highlighted, as was the importance of key people agreeing mutually beneficial terms for their futures at an early stage of the process. The data also demonstrated the types of negative tactics which can be employed by individuals who for whatever reason, attempt to block and delay the process, both covertly and overtly, and again, this is a factor which has not been identified in the HE literature to date. Table 23 on page 186 identifies the key political factors perceived as impacting upon the process, along with the number of references to them in the data, and number of sources who referred to them. Please see Appendix 8 for a more detailed classification of the key political facilitatory and inhibitory factors impacting upon the merger and re-designation process.

Table 23: Prevalence and Categorisation of Key Political Factors impacting upon the Process

| Category | Group | Factor | Refs | Sources |
|-----------|-----------------|---|------------|-----------|
| Political | | | 699 | 18 |
| | Macro Political | | 424 | 18 |
| | | The Political Landscape | 116 | 18 |
| | | Opposition from ‘Traditional’ Universities | 14 | 9 |
| | | Lack of Government/Department/HEA Commitment, Supports, Understanding & Clarity | 126 | 17 |
| | | Support & Pressure from Regional Stakeholders | 37 | 15 |
| | Micro Political | | 405 | 17 |
| | | Power Dynamics & Negotiations between Merging Institutions | 91 | 16 |
| | | Leadership & Charisma | 64 | 16 |
| | | Relationships between Key People in the Merging Organisations | 68 | 15 |
| | | Securing the Support of the Internal Senior Executive Team | 72 | 16 |
| | | Securing the Support of the wider Academy and Administrative Staff | 72 | 16 |
| | | Blocking & Delaying Tactics & ‘Game Playing’ | 44 | 10 |

6.3.3 Strategic Factors

The data suggests that there are a number of key strategic factors which are perceived as relevant to the merger process in the Irish context. These are further classified and discussed below.

The Strategic Environment

The strategic environment, and in particular the impact of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 and the difficult economic climate were cited by interviewees as having played a key role in institutional decision making. The National Strategy, which focused to a large extent on the IoT sector, set the impetus for change and opened up the possibility for re-designation for the IoTs. The difficult economic climate has led to financial challenges for some IoTs, who need to secure their future financial viability and sustainability. Merger and re-designation was seen as a way of achieving this aim. However, the reduction in funding to HEIs and the failure at various

levels to adequately fund the endeavour has been a consistent inhibitory factor throughout the entire process to date.

Drivers & the Case for Merger

Participants identified that the drivers for merger and the case for merger were critical to the process. While there were varied strategic drivers for merger, TU designation unified all institutions and Alliances as a key objective. Some Alliances were focused on creating critical mass in key areas, enhanced opportunities for research, a desire to transform competitive positioning and on improving access to educational opportunities within the region. However, certain factors, such as uncertainty around the concept of a TU, a failure to clearly and honestly articulate the academic case for merger, and the failure of policy makers to explain or justify the merger pre-requisite or to explore alternatives to merger, have caused difficulties during the process. These findings support the propositions by Davies (2013) who highlighted the importance of developing a shared vision, which is inspirational, rather than operational, and focusing upon this as the genesis for the proposed merger. This also aligns with accepted change management frameworks, such as those advocated by Kotter (1996), which emphasises the need to create a sense of urgency and a clear vision for change. In the absence of a compelling need for change and a clear vision for the future, it has been difficult to get 'buy in' into the concept of a TU, and secure wider support for the Alliances.

Making Key Strategic Choices

Finally, the data suggests that making key strategic choices about who to partner with, the mission and vision of the new institution and the name, governance and management structure of the new institution are critical to the process. Interviewees acknowledged the limitations imposed on institutions in this respect by national policy and political dictat. Participants identified the fact that some were reluctant 'bedfellows', or at different stages of their life cycle, as being problematic for the process. Although the mergers are sold as being 'voluntary' the reality is that some IOTs have limited options regarding their choice of partner. The data also suggests that contentious issues in relation to name, governance and management structure of the new institution may often lead to conflict, and should be resolved as early as possible in the process. This supports findings by Brown et al (2004) and HEFCE (2010) who identified that early agreement

on the position of the two heads of institution post-merger is an important issue, and can often be a reason that some merger proposals never progress past the initial stage(s).

Table 24 below identifies the prevalence and categorisation of the key strategic factors perceived as impacting upon the merger process. Please see Appendix 8 for a more detailed classification of the key facilitatory and inhibitory strategic factors impacting upon the merger and re-designation process.

Table 24: Prevalence and Categorisation of Key Strategic Factors Impacting upon the Process

| Category | Group | Factor | Refs | Sources |
|-----------|--|--|------------|-----------|
| Strategic | | | 368 | 18 |
| | The Strategic Environment | | 60 | 17 |
| | | Impact of National Strategy | 41 | 13 |
| | | Economic Climate | 19 | 8 |
| | Drivers & the Case for Merger | | 168 | 17 |
| | | Strategic Drivers for Merger | 36 | 14 |
| | | University Designation as Driver for Merger | 56 | 16 |
| | | Academic Case for Merger | 14 | 7 |
| | | Creation of Efficiencies & Rationalisation | 26 | 13 |
| | | Regional Impact | 27 | 13 |
| | | Alternatives to Merger | 9 | 7 |
| | Making Key Strategic Choices | | 103 | 17 |
| | | Selecting Partners | 41 | 14 |
| | | Name, Governance & Management Structure of New Institution | 34 | 11 |
| | | Vision & Mission | 28 | 9 |

6.3.4 Emotive Factors

There are a large number of unanticipated findings which suggest that emotive factors, which are particularly prevalent in the data collected, yet underexplored and underdeveloped in the literature on mergers in H.E., play a significant role in the merger process. Indeed, emotive factors feature higher than both strategic, and historic and cultural factors in terms of number of references in the data (See Table 22 above). This is of significance, given that not a single direct question about emotions was asked in the interviews. The emotive factors identified in the data deal with both personal and interpersonal emotions, and are discussed below.

Personal Emotions

In terms of personal emotive factors, interviewees reported that personal commitment, belief and passion were critical to the success of a purported merger project. Belief and commitment from the very senior levels of the organisation is perceived as critical, as is commitment to the outcome rather than the institution. If there is a lack of belief or commitment, this does not bode well for the process. This supports findings by Brown et al (2004) that a lack of commitment or belief is a key inhibitory factor to HE mergers.

The most prevalent emotive factors in the Irish context were uncertainty, insecurity, fear and frustration as a result of the merger process. Interviewees reported feelings of uncertainty due to the lack of clarity around the process and criteria, political instability and a lack of communication. Many were left questioning if the merger would in fact happen at all. Interviewees reported that they were afraid of being left behind in the sector or in their institution and were apprehensive about the future post-merger. Interviewees reported feelings of insecurity, and fear of losing their institutional identity, autonomy and power.

Many were frustrated with the merger process, were feeling drained, stressed, pressured or sapped of energy and were worried about a perceived lack of control around the process. There was also a belief amongst some interviewees that there was a level of dishonesty within the process. The data suggests that feelings of uncertainty and fear had led to conjecture, rumour and perhaps even feelings of paranoia and conspiracy during the process. These emotions have clearly played a significant role in the merger process to date, and should be considered by merging institutions as a key relevant factor in the process.

Interpersonal Emotions

In terms of interpersonal emotions, the data reflects the need to ensure respect, equality and parity of esteem between the partners, regardless of their size, academic reputation, etc. Mutual respect is essential, and if this ingredient is missing it leads to feelings of resentment, along with allegations of arrogance and superiority, often against the larger partner. The data suggests that it is essential to develop feelings of trust, honesty and understanding between the partner institutions, and a degree of empathy and

sensitivity is required. The partners must accept that while some degree of suspicion is normal at the beginning of the process, they must work together to actively build trust, and not simply think that it will just happen, particularly in the absence of a prior history of collaboration.

This research also highlights that distrust, suspicion, hostility and resentment, if allowed to develop or continue between partners, will be detrimental to the process. Interviewees provided examples of the corrosive effect of distrust on the process. Distrust during the process can manifest itself between merging organisations, within individual organisations or between merging organisations and government or system level actors. Feelings of distrust, suspicion, antagonism, hostility, resentment and paranoia were surprisingly prevalent in the data, and if not acknowledged, addressed and resolved at an early stage, may be fatal to the process.

Table 25 below identifies the prevalence and categorisation of the key emotive factors impacting upon the process. Please see Appendix 8 for a more detailed classification of the key facilitatory and inhibitory emotive factors impacting upon the merger and re-designation process.

Table 25: Prevalence and Categorisation of Key Emotive Factors Impacting upon the Process

| Category | Group | Factor | Refs | Sources |
|----------|---------------|---|------------|-----------|
| Emotive | | | 390 | 18 |
| | Personal | | 117 | 17 |
| | | Commitment, Belief & Passion | 62 | 14 |
| | | Uncertainty, Insecurity, Fear & Frustration | 115 | 15 |
| | Interpersonal | | 212 | 18 |
| | | Respect, Equality & Parity of Esteem | 30 | 8 |
| | | Trust, Honesty & Understanding | 88 | 16 |
| | | Distrust, Suspicion, Hostility & Resentment | 94 | 16 |

6.3.5 Operational Factors

There are a large number of key operational factors which the data suggest play a significant role in the merger process.

Role of Key Actors

Firstly, the role of key actors in the process, particularly external consultants, facilitators and mediators has been perceived as important in providing knowledge, comfort and confidence internally and confidence and credibility externally. External consultants have also acted as a neutral and independent voice and as both formal and informal mediators, although in some cases were perceived to have been used scapegoats during the process. The degree to which external consultants were involved in the process certainly varied across the Alliances, with one in particular relying quite heavily on their input. All three Alliances also appointed external Chairs to their high level Steering Committees. These external chairs were appointed to oversee and steer the process and, critically, to act independently of all of the partners.

Internally, while the Academic Councils have had little input into the process to date, many of the Governing Bodies have played a key role in driving the process, particularly the Chairs who have been very actively involved and supportive. Where joint Governing Body meetings took place these were thought to be positive and supportive of the process. Interviewees did however identify weaknesses in terms of the difficulties of getting all of the Governing Bodies to agree to the same thing at the same time, and felt it would have been better to have one joint or merged Governing Body in situ at an early stage of the process to facilitate decision making. Such a body, while perhaps transient and embryonic in nature, would have fostered greater trust and understanding between the organisations, as well as facilitating the necessary high-level decisions which must be made during the pre-merger process. It may also have prevented misunderstandings and miscommunications both between and within institutions which were evident in the data collected.

All three Alliances appointed a Project Manager/Coordinator to manage the operational aspects of the merger process. In fact, Alliances A and B appointed 2 separate project coordinators, one from each partner IoT. The degree to which this was perceived as successful appears to have been dependent upon the ability of these individuals to form strong personal relationships with their counterpart in the partner IoT, and also their ability to network and influence others both up and down through the multiple layers of actors in their organisations.

Project Structures, Planning & Resources

Secondly, in relation to project structures, resources, project planning and timelines, the data identifies that it is important to have a single decision making body and one project office where project managers or coordinators are based. As noted above, only one of the Alliances established a joint project office with a single agreed project coordinator, and this was perceived as having facilitated that Alliance in progressing through the stages.

In addition to the project coordinator, various thematic task/working groups were established in all three Alliances to manage and co-ordinate work across various key areas, such as academic programmes, research and development, internationalisation, IT, finance, HR, etc. These groups were intended to be used as a vehicle for completing the necessary pre-merger work in the particular area, and also to foster closer working relationships, trust and understanding between participants from the various partner institutions. However, the data gathered indicated that the success of these thematic working groups in achieving their objectives varied from Alliance to Alliance, with Alliance B in particular encountering difficulties.

In terms of resources, the data suggests that there has been a perceived underestimation of the work and resources required to effect a successful merger, and a failure to accurately cost the project. It also suggests that both the HEA and institutions themselves have failed to commit the necessary human and financial resources required to effect a merger, and that this may be linked to a reluctance to invest significant resources due to uncertainty with the process and outcome, and due to the fact that the legislation has not yet been enacted.

Interviewees suggested that project planning had been made more difficult than necessary throughout the process due to the difficulty in planning timelines in the absence of enabling legislation and certainty around the process and criteria. Interviewees also referred to an apparent inability or reluctance of steering or implementation groups to make decisions. The research found that agreeing an MOU early in the process, having joint budgets, getting the right project leaders in place and engaging in peer reviews in parallel with the formal re-designation process facilitated the process from a project planning perspective.

The issue of due diligence and risk assessment gave rise to differing perspectives from interviewees. Some felt that completing due diligence early in the process was

beneficial, but others felt that it was not necessary and that pushing for the completion of due diligence was a sign of distrust.

The findings suggest that it is critically important to build and maintain momentum and stability during the process, to set and adhere to clear dates and timelines and to move quickly to prevent opponents to the merger from gaining traction. Interviewees reported that a lack of momentum due to the stop start nature of the process to date had caused difficulties and reported delays caused both by external (failure to enact legislation, political instability and change, failure to provide funding mechanisms) and internal (IR issues, changes in key personnel, lack of resources, 'game playing') factors. This supports and builds upon the findings of Brown et al (2004), Harman (2003)) that a short time scale between the decision to merge and the legal merger facilitates the process.

Communicating with Staff & IR Issues

The data suggests that there is a continued need for communication, engagement and support throughout the process. This supports findings by Locke (2007), Cartwright et al, 2007, Harman (2010) and Brown et al (2004), that clear, timely and genuine communication with staff is required throughout the process. The data shows that it is critical that staff, both academic and administrative, are communicated to and engaged with the process, and that this happens from an early stage, via a variety of methods, which may include 'town hall' meetings, workshops, departmental or local meetings, etc. The data also suggests that different communication strategies may be necessary to deal with administrative and academic staff within the institution. Failure to engage or consult with staff or to get them engaged in the process, an unwillingness or inability to provide clarity, or secrecy or a lack of information can all inhibit the merger process to a significant degree and can lead to IR issues, including resistance and opposition from Trade Unions, and a heightened sense of fear due to uncertainty on the part of institute staff. The data also suggests that communication and engagement are not only necessary internally, but also externally, throughout the process, and there is a clear need to engage with stakeholders, establish a narrative with them and to sell the vision of the new merged institution.

Engagement & Support

Throughout the process, training and support for the senior executive and management team around change management, mergers and strategy has been identified as a facilitatory factor to the merger process, and failure to invest in management training and development, or to address the additional pressure and stress placed on senior managers is a factor which has been shown by this research to inhibit the process. Engagement with and support from key regional stakeholders is also considered to be important. One of the inhibitory factors identified in the data was the general lack of co-operation across the Irish IoTs who have formed Alliances to merger. There has been little to no co-operation or collaboration, particularly at senior levels, although interviewees all commented that they thought such action would have facilitated the process.

Table 26 below identifies the prevalence and categorisation of the key operational factors perceived as impacting upon the merger process. Please see Appendix 8 for a more detailed classification of the key facilitatory and inhibitory operational factors impacting upon the merger and re-designation process.

Table 26: Prevalence and Categorisation of Key Operational Factors Impacting upon the Process

| Category | Group | Factor | Refs | Sources |
|-------------|---|--|------------|-----------|
| Operational | | | 562 | 18 |
| | Project Structures, Planning & Resources | | 302 | 18 |
| | | Structures | 19 | 8 |
| | | Resources | 72 | 14 |
| | | Project Planning | 131 | 17 |
| | | Due Diligence & Risk Assessment | 21 | 12 |
| | | Building & Maintaining Momentum & Stability | 59 | 13 |
| | Engagement & Support | | 31 | 11 |
| | | Engagement with Stakeholders in the Wider Region | 9 | 4 |
| | | Training & Support for Executive Team & Managers | 11 | 6 |
| | | Lack of Cooperation Across IoT Sector | 11 | 4 |
| | Role of Key Actors | | 120 | 15 |
| | | Role of Academic Council | 11 | 5 |
| | | Role of Governing Body | 36 | 14 |
| | | Role of External Consultants, Facilitators & Mediators | 73 | 15 |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|------------|-----------|
| | | | | |
| | Communi- cating with Staff & IR Issues | | 108 | 16 |
| | | IR Issues | 36 | 15 |
| | | Communicating with, Consulting & Engaging Staff | 72 | 16 |

6.3.6 Historic & Cultural Factors

Finally, the data indicates that both history and culture have an important role to play in the merger process.

Historic Factors

The historic relationship between the partners is perceived as being of critical importance. The data suggests that while the absence of a history of collaboration may not be fatal, a history of competition or strained relations, or indeed the failure of a previous collaboration between the two, does not bode well.

Other factors such as historic positioning are important, and the data indicates that similarities in historical development, orientation and trajectories will help to facilitate the process, whilst differences between the partners in this regard, and particularly in relation to trajectories towards university designation, can inhibit the process. Additionally, a historic lack of strong co-operation across the IoT sector more generally emerged as being relevant inhibitory factor, and it appears that the IoT sector as a whole does not have strong system level representation.

Cultural Factors

In cultural terms, the public sector, risk adverse nature of Irish IoTs was perceived to be an inhibitory factor to the process. The lack of a hierarchical or managerial organisational culture, along with the historic lack of independence or autonomy of IoTs is also problematic for the process, as is a collegiate culture which engenders a high degree of allegiance to the organisation, and greater resistance to change. The inflexible boundary and operating conditions in the sector were also cited as cultural factors which have acted to inhibit progress, particularly difficulties around staff contracts.

Perceived or actual cultural differences between institutions were found by Brown et al (2004), Harman (2002), and Harman and Harman (2003) to be an inhibitory factor

to HE mergers. This research identifies that differences in academic reputation, trajectory and positioning, values, identities and allegiances between merging organisations are perceived as being particularly problematic. A failure to investigate and interrogate cultural issues, value systems and issues of identity, can cause significant problems for the merger process, as can attempting a merger between partners who have different geographical and regional identities.

Table 27 on page 195 identifies the prevalence and categorisation of the key emotive factors impacting upon the process. Please see Appendix 8 for a more detailed classification of the key facilitatory and inhibitory historic and cultural factors perceived as impacting upon the merger and re-designation process.

***Table 27: Prevalence and Categorisation of Key Historic & Cultural Factors
Impacting upon the Process***

| Category | Group | Factor | Refs | Sources |
|---------------------|----------|--|------------|-----------|
| Historic & Cultural | | | 206 | 18 |
| | Cultural | | 150 | 18 |
| | | Nature of Irish IoTs | 15 | 7 |
| | | Inflexibility of Boundary & Operating Conditions | 30 | 8 |
| | | Cultural Issues, Values & Identity | 65 | 15 |
| | | Regional Focus | 26 | 13 |
| | | Academic Reputation | 14 | 7 |
| | Historic | | 55 | 13 |
| | | Historic Relationship between the Partners | 32 | 12 |
| | | Historic Positioning & Trajectory | 12 | 6 |
| | | Lack of Cooperation Across IoT Sector | 11 | 4 |

6.3.7 Conclusion

The data presented above from the cross case analysis highlights the complexity of merger processes in HE. It details the political, emotive, operational, strategic and historic and cultural factors which are perceived as impacting upon the Irish IoT sector as it prepares to undergo a series of mergers. The analysis indicates that the merger process in the Irish IoT sector is a highly politicised and emotive process, which is both complex and ambiguous. Based on a rigorous thematic analysis of the data across all three Alliances, a framework of five key factors is proposed.

Key macro and micro political factors, such as the Irish political landscape and power dynamics and negotiations between Institutions emerge from the data as being critical to the process, as do emotive factors such as uncertainty, insecurity, fear and frustration, trust, honesty and understanding, and distrust, suspicion, hostility and resentment. It is also evident that the perceived lack of support, clarity and understanding from system level actors in the Irish system has severely delayed and inhibited the process to date, and calls into question the commitment at that level to the process.

This research highlights just how important and influential both the political and emotive dimensions to HE mergers are, and argues that it is these factors, rather than strategic or operational considerations, which are often most the powerful. The findings demonstrate the need for leaders of merging institutions to be cognisant of and to operate across all dimensions discussed above, both formally and an informally. Institutional leadership is key to the process and leaders need to continuously build support both internally & externally for the merger, being mindful of the political, historical and cultural, operational and emotive factors outlined above. Leaders must move beyond tribal considerations to focus on the new institution. This research suggests that it is good people management, as opposed to process or project management that may ultimately lead to the merger going ahead or not.

Unfortunately, there appears to be a lack of alignment in the Irish context which is creating significant difficulties for the institutions involved in the process. This lack of alignment exists between national policy and strategy and between policy-makers and policy implementers. It also appears that the objectives of government and policy makers to reduce fragmentation in the sector, to have fewer, larger institutions with critical mass, to reduce duplication and to create efficiencies and economies of scale do not align to the objectives of the merging institutions themselves, who are primarily concerned with institutional transformation to TUs, both to strengthen their competitive/market position and to provide for growth. In addition, the data suggests that within Alliances there is also a lack of alignment between the motives and desires of individual merging partner institutions, and also even between the motives and desires of those within individual merging institutions. This lack of alignment poses serious difficulties for Irish IoTs who are proposing to merge, and must be addressed at both system and institutional level if we are to have successful mergers in the sector into the future.

7. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the answers to my research questions, based upon the findings presented and discussed in Chapters Five and Six. This chapter also asserts the significance of my study in terms of its contribution to academic knowledge and offers a self-reflection upon the limitations of my research design, data collection, analysis and findings. Finally, it presents recommendations, both for further research on the topic and for practice.

7.2 Answers to Research Questions

The central research question of my study is: What are the key factors which facilitate on one hand, or inhibit on the other the merger process in the Irish IoT sector? My findings, based on the perceptions of my interviewees as discussed in Chapters Five and Six above, suggest that there are a broad range of political, strategic, operational, historic and cultural, and emotive factors which are impacting upon the merger process, both at system and institutional level, within the Irish HE system. The key facilitatory and inhibitory factors identified from my research are summarised below, along with the identification and explanation of the particular features of the Irish context which may explain the emergence of these factors. I also examine the micro-political/policy phases through which the proposed mergers must proceed and suggest some critical success factors which can be drawn from the three case studies for HE mergers generally.

7.2.1 What do management in Irish IoTs perceive to be the main facilitators of the merger process?

From the data collected and analysed, the following key factors, presented in Table 28 below, are perceived by management within the Alliances to have facilitated the progress of some or all of the Irish Alliances through the merger and re-designation process to date. These factors are categorised into system and institutional level factors, using the classification proposed in Chapter Six.

Table 28: Key Facilitatory Factors in Irish IoT Merger & TU Re-Designation Process

| | System/Macro Level | Institutional/Micro Level |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Political | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Input and support of successive key political actors. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong committed leaders (Presidents and Project Chairs) who have driven the project. Establishment of strong formal and informal relationships between key people in merging institutions, both at leadership level and between those working on the TU projects. Champions within the Alliances who demonstrated leadership in relation to the project and who have helped to facilitate the process. Providing necessary reassurances to the smaller partner through an integration agreement. |
| Strategic | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driver to become a TU and to ensure future viability and sustainability. |
| Operational | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitators appointed by the relevant Minister to get the process back on track after the withdrawal of one of the partners. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment by the partner IoTs to providing the necessary human resources to the project. Getting the right project managers in place, who are committed to the merger and have a strong working relationship. Creation of a single TU office at an early stage in the process. Appointment of credible and knowledgeable external consultants to provide advice, guidance, comfort, confidence and credibility, both internally and externally. |
| Historic & Cultural | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment from the partners to transform and create a new culture for the new institution. |
| Emotive | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High levels of trust, openness, honesty and understanding between partner institutions. Ability to be honest and frank, and to have a disagreement and move on. |

7.2.2 What do management in Irish IoTs perceive to be the main inhibitors of the merger process?

From the data collected and analysed, the key factors, presented in Table 29 below, are perceived by management within the Alliances to have inhibited the progress of some or all of the Irish Alliances through the merger and re-designation process to date. These factors are categorised into system and institutional level factors, using the classification presented in Chapter Six.

Table 29: Key Inhibitory Factors in Irish IoT Merger & TU Re-Designation Process

| | System/Macro Level | Institutional/Micro Level |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Political | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainties within and difficulties with the HEA criteria and process for merger and re-designation. • Failure of government to enact necessary legislation and the resultant uncertainty regarding timelines for merger, staffing concerns, etc. • Perceived lack of alignment between HEA and Department & Government objectives. • Failure of Government/HEA to provide necessary funding mechanisms. • 'Hands off', disinterested approach from both HEA & Department. • Lack of understanding by the HEA, and its failure to prioritise the merger project. • Unwarranted levels of political interference, disruption and 'playing politics' with the merger process. • Political 'dictat' vis-a-vis partner choice. • Unrealistic expectations from politicians and the government in relation to the merger process. • Unsuitable, politically appointed consultants/ facilitators. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns of smaller institutions about power imbalance, the possibility of losing identity or autonomy and being 'swallowed up'. • Difficulty creating a 'merger of equals' and parity of esteem. • Power plays between partner institutions, who were seeking to establish as much bargaining power as possible when it came to negotiations. • Unwillingness of partners to acknowledge each other's strengths or for partners to identify their own weaknesses. • Efforts by the partners to undermine each other by attempting to expose and exploit perceived weaknesses to exert strength and enhance positioning. • Disruption and instability during the process due to changes in leadership. • Failure by leadership to bring the academy on board. • Failure to get the Senior Executive Team on board. • Distrust of leader(s). • Leaders 'playing along' with the politicians and the Department. • 'Tribalism' and posturing for position. |
| Strategic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to clearly articulate the nature of what the new TUs should be. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty surrounding the mission and the very nature of what the new TU will be. • Failure to agree governance and management structures, particularly in relation to the location of the headquarters of the new institution. |
| Operational | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to commit the necessary human and financial resources to the project. • Failure to engage the wider staff community in the merger project and resultant IR Issues. • Diversionary and delaying tactics employed by the partners. • Inability to build and maintain momentum throughout the process and resultant loss of momentum and enthusiasm for the project. |
| Historic & Cultural | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historically strained and competitive relationship between the partners. • Perceived cultural differences and failure to investigate or interrogate perceived cultural issues at an early stage in the process. |
| Emotive | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of commitment to, belief in and passion for the project. • Feelings of uncertainty, fear, frustration and insecurity in relation to the merger process and outcome. • Relationships characterised by distrust, hostility, resentment, suspicion and paranoia between partner institutions. |

7.2.3 Do any of these factors differ from those identified in the literature as being facilitatory or inhibitory factors for HE mergers, and if so, what were the particular features of the Irish context that led to these differences?

The factors identified above differ to those already recognised in the literature as being facilitatory or inhibitory factors for HE mergers in a number of respects. Firstly, the emphasis on system level factors and how these are perceived to have inhibited the progress of the Alliances is something which has clearly emerged from this study, yet has not been evidenced in the literature to any significant extent to date. In particular, the uncertainties and difficulties with the process and criteria for merger and re-designation, along with the failure to enact the necessary legislation to allow for merger, and the failure to provide funding, advice or support mechanisms to institutions have been significant inhibitors to the process and raise questions about the perceived lack of support from and alignment between the HEA, the Department and Government. The lack of either understanding, willingness or both to provide the necessary ingredients, in terms of resources, boundary or operating conditions and supports, for a successful merger and re-designation process, is particularly evident in the Irish context.

The second differentiator lies in the presence and prevalence of political factors, both macro and micro, which have impacted upon the process to date. At a macro political level, there has been inordinate interest from some key regional actors, which has been viewed by some as supportive, but by others as interference, disruption and ‘playing politics’ with the process. The inclusion in the Programme for Government in 2011 of a specific reference to one of the Alliances provides an example of what some have viewed as political ‘dictat’ in relation to merger and partner choice. Political interference is also evidenced by the appointment of external consultants/facilitators to the Alliances by senior Government Ministers. Interviewees reported that it appeared as if politicians and government had unrealistic expectations in relation to the merger process, and underestimated the resources required to create a truly credible TU. In fact, so little attention was given to the concept, nature and characteristics of a TU at system and policy level, that it is no wonder confusion is still apparent within the Irish HE system over exactly what a TU should be. In relation to micro-political factors, my findings emphasise just how political the merger process is. Key issues around power imbalance, difficulties creating a ‘merger of equals’ and the importance of establishing

parity of esteem are evident. Power plays between partner institutions, who sought to establish as much bargaining power as possible when it came to negotiations, were prevalent. This research provides some excellent examples, not yet evidenced in the literature, of these power plays manifesting themselves in the form of unwillingness of partners both to acknowledge each other's strengths and to identify their own weaknesses and even efforts by the partners to undermine each other by attempting to expose and exploit perceived weaknesses to exert strength and enhance positioning. These factors were particularly prevalent in the Alliance which was specifically mentioned in the Programme for Government, and thus forced the hands of the partners somewhat to engage in the process, whether they believed in it or each other. The political nature of Irish IoTs, and the perception that politicians have viewed them as their 'playthings' certainly had an impact on the process, with interviewees suggesting that institutional leaders felt that they had little choice but to go along with the politicians and the Department. This study also provides empirical evidence of how other micro-political factors such as disruption and instability during the process due to a change in leadership, the failure of leadership to bring the academy and senior executive team on board, and 'tribalism' and posturing for position, can adversely affect the merger process.

The third key differentiator, between this research and the existing body of HE literature is the identification and emphasis on the importance of emotive factors in the merger and re-designation process. This is largely an unanticipated finding, as no specific questions were asked of any interviewee about their emotive state, or how emotions had impacted upon the process. Nonetheless it is evident from the data that a wide range of influential emotive factors, both facilitatory and inhibitory, have impacted significantly upon the process. Trust, openness, honesty, understanding, uncertainty, fear, frustration, insecurity, distrust, hostility, resentment, suspicion, paranoia, and a lack of commitment to, belief in and passion for the project were the key emotions which emerged from the data. Perhaps their prevalence in the Irish context can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, the fact that the process has been ongoing for such a long period of time has probably led those involved with the process to feel heightened levels of frustration, anxiety, etc. than might otherwise be the case. Secondly, the lack of guidance and support including the enabling legislation, from system level actors, has created a landscape where uncertainty has been allowed to fester and has now developed into suspicion and even paranoia in some quarters. This fear and uncertainty has also given rise to

contentious IR issues, which are now plaguing the process in the Irish IoT merger and re-designation efforts.

7.2.4 What are the micro-political/policy phases through which the proposed mergers may proceed?

The data strongly suggests that mergers are political phenomena, which provide an arena for the accumulation and use of power by institutional leadership. My findings illustrate the need for strong, charismatic, credible leaders, who have the ability to use political power and networks within the institution to achieve their goal. This is particularly necessary in the Irish HE context due to the collegiate, rather than hierarchical nature of IoTs. Leaders wishing to effect a merger must be able to influence, incentivise and manipulate others in the organisation, and should know which levers to pull and/or incentives to use. The leaders must also identify credible, respected, knowledgeable champions at all levels of the organisation who are supportive of the merger and who will influence others across the organisation. The leaders must be able to identify, isolate, side line or remove problematic people at senior levels in the organisation, and to 'sell' the message both to the academy, administrative staff, and indeed, stakeholders. There should be early negotiation and agreement about senior posts in the new institution to avoid the tribalism and posturing evident in some of the case studies.

Davies (1985) suggested that there are numerous factors which reinforce and interplay with each-other both within and outside the HE system which make rational, planned policy formation and implementation difficult. He stated that policy formation in HEIs is inevitably a political process and centres on the disposition of power; the capacity to control key organisational influences and; levers or incentives for the fulfilment of particular preferences. This proposition is certainly supported by the findings of this research and has important implications for HE Alliances planning a merger. Too keen a focus on the mechanical, rational, process orientated aspects of the merger, without due consideration being given to the macro and micro political aspects may be fatal, and this research illustrates just how important the micro politics of merger are.

Broadly speaking, the data collected and analysed suggests there are a number of distinct micro-political phases through which HE mergers proceed. These are outlined below and illustrated in Figure 11 below.

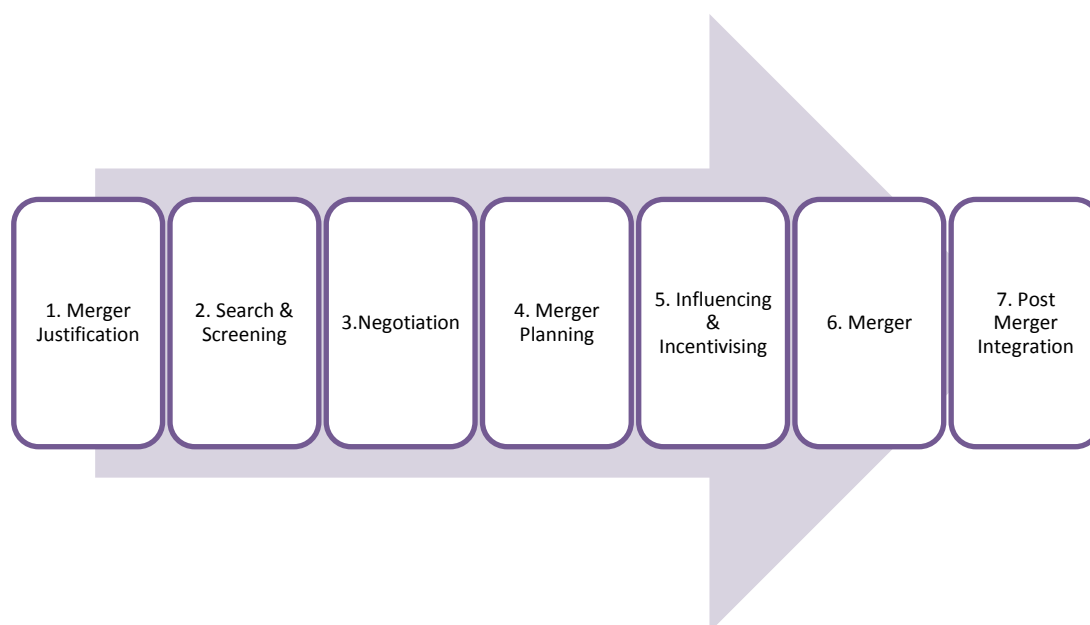


Figure 11: Micro Political/Policy Phases during HE Merger Process

These phases each have distinct functions, inputs, processes and outputs, and are explained in more detail below.

1. Merger Justification

This phase involves the identification of a problem, issue, challenge or opportunity facing a HEI, and the relevant solution. During this phase, the rationale or driver(s) for merger become clear, and merger is seen as a solution to a problem or a means to an end. It is critical at this stage to clearly articulate the need or rationale for the merger.

2. Search and Screening

This phase involves the search for suitable partner or partners for the merger. This may involve building upon existing collaborative relationships or forming a new relationship with another HEI(s). This phase may take some time and may involve some potential partners withdrawing until a workable coalition with shared interests is formed.

3. Negotiation

During this phase the partners agree on the key terms of reference and goals for the merger, usually in the form of a MOU (a Memorandum of Understanding). This is usually negotiated by a small group of senior leaders from each HEI. Ideally, at this stage, agreement should also be reached on contentious issues such as the name and location of headquarters of the new institution, and the future of the existing Presidents and or senior executive teams.

4. Merger Planning

At this stage, formal and informal structures to effect the merger should be established. Usually a high level steering group, along with a project coordinator and project team, with distinct working groups, is provided for. External consultants, if not already engaged, may also be brought on board. An outline project plan with clear target dates and the necessary financial and human resources is put in place in place. The various groups will then work on preparing a business case and plan for merger and on completing the due diligence exercises.

5. Influencing and Incentivising

Throughout the entire process, leaders and those involved in the project must continuously build up support for the merger both internally and externally. As stated above, leaders need to sell the message, and influence, incentivise and manipulate as necessary to ensure that the senior executive team, the academy and administrative staff are engaged with and broadly supportive of the merger process.

5. Merger

Once a formal final decision to merge has been made, a date is set and the necessary legal mechanisms are put in place to allow the merger take place. The merger is essentially a legal process at a point in time whereby two separate legal entities/HEIs are dissolved and a new legal entity/HEI is formed.

6. Post-Merger Integration

Once the merger has taken place, the focus then shifts to post merger integration and to adding value, creating efficiencies and achieving whatever other merger objectives were set, which may include re-designation.

The phases proposed above broadly align to Davies (1985) four-phase ‘political systems model’ of policy formation for HEIs, based around Enderud’s (1977) work. The merger justification phase aligns to Davies (1985) ‘*garbage can*’ phase which is a highly ambiguous period in which the problem must be defined. The search and screening and negotiation phases align to Davies (1985) ‘*negotiation and political*’ phase, where a workable coalition of interests must be established. The merger planning and incentivising and influencing stages broadly align to Davies (1985) ‘*persuasion and legitimisation phase*’ which is essentially a collegial period where agreement is reached on policy lines of action; and finally, the merger and post-merger integration phases align to a Davies (1985) ‘*bureaucratisation*’ phase, where the policy is implemented.

Naturally, these phases may not be as linear as suggested above, and there are possibilities of loop backs or jump forwards, depending on the particular set of circumstances. As the partners move through the phases, they ideally progress from a highly ambiguous, informal state, towards a more certain, defined, formal conclusion.

Figure 12 below presents an adapted version of Davies political systems model, as I suggest it applies to HE mergers. It includes the key inputs, processes and outputs required at each stage of the process.

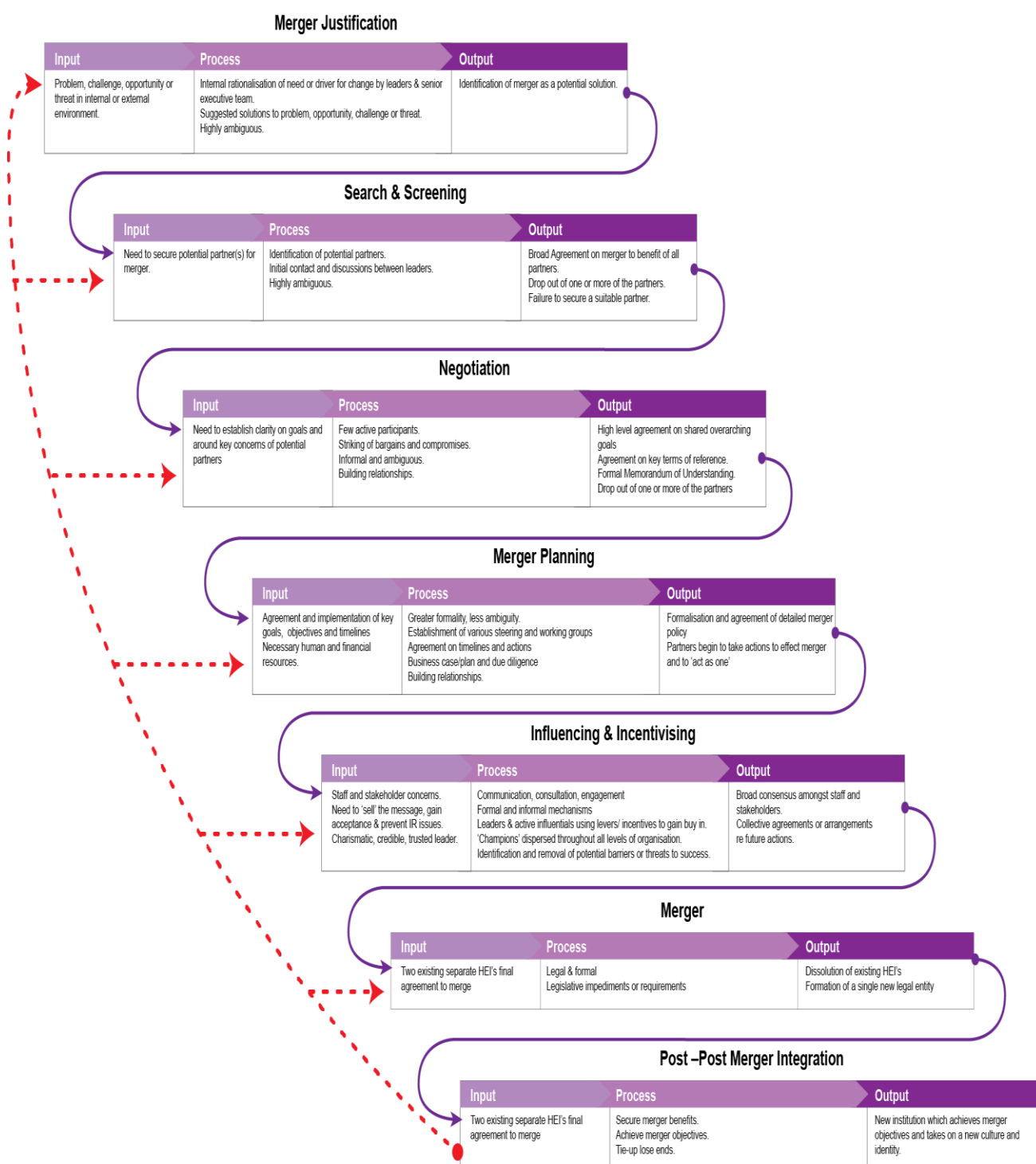


Figure 12: Political System Model of HE Merger Policy Formation & Implementation (Adapted from Davies 1985)

Davies (1985) opines that if any phase is missed, or is given insufficient time, problems may arise later in the process process. Davies cites examples such as a failure to appreciate the magnitude and dynamics of political feeling generated by policy proposals, or reluctance of top management to get involved in bargains and incentives to develop support for policy packages, as being some of the reasons why policy proposals may flounder.

In the case studies which formed part of this research, there is evidence of a failure to address some of the phases proposed in my model above to a sufficient extent. For example:

- During the search and screening phase, we saw a case of partners who were essentially forced together, despite their own misgivings, for a political end, and this had an inhibitory effect on the process.
- During the negotiation phase, there appeared to be reluctance in some of the Alliances to address contentious issues, compromise and strike a bargain, along with an inability or unwillingness to build constructive working relationships. Again this failure had negative consequences for those Alliances.
- During the merger planning phase, the consequences of a failure to invest the necessary human and financial resources into the project was evident across two of the case studies and acted in an inhibitory fashion.
- During the influencing and incentivising phase, there were clear failures across all three Alliances to fully appreciate the adverse feelings generated by the merger proposals and to address these before they got out of hand. There was also a marked reluctance, perhaps due to the highly regulated nature of Irish IoTs, of senior leaders to get involved in bargaining and to use incentives to garner the necessary levels of support for the merger, particularly at executive level.

These examples from the case studies provide evidence of the importance of each of the key phases outlined above and support the proposed political system model for merger policy formation and implementation. It also illustrates how the proposed model may be used to examine, identify and conceptualise why some merger proposals and processes might fail.

7.2.5 What critical success factors for HE mergers can be identified from these cases?

The key factors which are perceived to have facilitated and inhibited the merger process in Irish IoTs have been discussed in detail above. While the merger process in all three Alliances is ongoing, and thus cannot yet be considered as either successful or not, the data does illustrate the importance of a number of key factors perceived to be critical for the success of the process itself. These include:

- **At system level:**

- The provision of clarity and certainty around the desired HE system configuration, merger process, stages and criteria (if any) and the paradigm of the desired new model of HEI to be created.
- Alignment between national policy, strategy and its implementation.
- Consistency in approach and communication.
- Provision of the necessary financial resources, advice, support and facilitation mechanisms.
- Clarity on contentious national issues, such as staffing and IR matters.
- Provision of the necessary legislative framework as early as possible, and preferably before, the process starts.

- **At institutional level**

- Strong, credible, trusted, committed leaders who believe in and are passionate about the merger project.
- Build and maintain strong working relationships between key actors in the merging HEIs, based on trust, honesty, openness, respect, empathy and understanding.
- Acknowledgement of and respect for differences in the merging institutions histories, identities, relative sizes and trajectories. Provision of reassurance to the smaller partners as necessary.
- Understanding by the leaders of the need to influence and incentivise to get 'buy in' to the merger project, not least amongst his/her senior executive team, and of the micro-politics of the merger process.
- Early and regular communication, consultation and engagement with staff and staff representatives in relation to the project including

acknowledgement of feelings of fear, insecurity, frustration, uncertainty and suspicion.

- Interrogation and resolution of cultural issues at an early stage in the process and commitment to creating new culture.
- Provision of the necessary financial and human resources for the merger.
- Build and maintain momentum and stability during the process.

7.3 Contribution to Literature

This thesis has made an original theoretical, geographical and practical contribution to existing knowledge on the merger process in HE. Research to date in this area has focused primarily on what factors led to the successful implementation of an agreement to merge and has not focused on the dynamics of the merger process itself to any great extent (Brown et al, 2004). Indeed, much of the research conducted on HE mergers to date has taken place retrospectively, many years after the completion of the process. In addition, little research has been conducted in the Irish HE setting, which due to its particular history, culture and structures, is worthy of further investigation. My research, which took place concurrently with the merger process, provides a real and contemporaneous insight into the merger process in Irish HE and has highlighted the political and emotive nature of the mergers in the sector.

This thesis has contributed to the theoretical literature in this area both by identifying the key micro-political policy phases through which merger proposals in HE progress, and also by identifying and classifying the wide range of factors which can operate to facilitate and inhibit that process.

Firstly, my thesis identifies the key perceived facilitatory and inhibitory factors to merger processes. It proposes that these be classified into political, strategic, operational, historic and cultural and emotive factors, and argues that HE leaders who wish effectively negotiate the merger process must be cognisant of and operate in all of those dimensions.

Secondly, my thesis proposes a framework, adapted from Davies (1985) of the key micro-political phases through which HE mergers proceed, and argues that HEIs who fail to afford sufficient attention to any of these phases may find themselves in difficulty as the process develops.

Thirdly, my thesis demonstrates the critical role that system level actors and supports play during the merger process, and illustrates how in the absence of the necessary system level clarity and supports, the entire process can be undermined.

Fourthly, it provides evidence of the highly ambiguous, political nature of mergers in HE, and demonstrates the hugely significant role which both macro and micro political factors play during the process. It argues that the leaders must be able to use levers and incentives to get what they want and must also be able to negotiate the often difficult macro political landscape.

Fifthly, my thesis provides evidence of the critical role of emotive factors which impact upon merger process in HE, and argues that these powerful factors are often overlooked by leaders who may focus on process rather than people, to their detriment. This thesis provides an example of a case where negative emotions, such as distrust, insecurity, resentment, suspicion and paranoia, were allowed to develop and fester between partners, and the significant detrimental impact which those feelings had on the process. It provides excellent empirical data on the key role of trust in HE mergers, which is often referred to but rarely illustrated in an empirical manner.

Sixthly, my research has made a theoretical contribution regarding the impact of factors such as power dynamics and negotiations, the importance of maintaining momentum and stability throughout the process, and the key roles which external change agents can play, during the process.

Finally, my thesis has made a contribution to theoretical knowledge by testing some assumptions and findings in the existing body of literature. My findings challenge the proposition that single sector collaborations and mergers are easier to manage and that mergers between institutions with complementary missions and academic profiles is more straightforward (Harman & Robertson Cuninghame, 1995; Eastman and Lang, 2001). In fact, it found that significant cultural differences can exist between institutions in the same sector, with similar academic profiles and missions, and this can lead to culture clashes and difficulties during the merger process. It also found that values led HEIs may be more difficult to merge, due to a strong allegiance to existing institutional culture and values. This supports propositions by Harman (2002) and Harman and Harman (2003), who identified the powerful influence which culture has in some merger situations, and Buono and Bowditch (1989), who found that the 'thicker' the culture and the greater the degree of shared beliefs and values within an organisation, the more potent the culture's influence will be. In relation to the assumption within the literature that two partner mergers are

generally easier to manage than multi-partner mergers (Harman & Harman, 2002; Kyvik & Stensaker, 2013), I found conflicting opinions. Some interviewees reported that it was easier to plan a merger with two partners, rather than three, supporting the proposition by Harman & Harman (2003) and Kyvik & Stensaker (2013) that mergers between two partners are easier to manage than those between multiple partners. However, within one of the Alliances, interviewees (particularly from the smaller Alliance), felt that having three partners was easier, as it gave the two smaller partners greater collective strength vis-a-vis their larger partner. This is an interesting finding which challenges the findings of Harman & Harman (2003) and Kyvik & Stensaker (2013). My research also supports the finding by Harman & Meek (2002) and Thompson (2012) that considerable external pressure or force to effect a merger is often not helpful to the process and that if a proposed merger is forced, and one or both of the parties rejects the idea or benefits of merging, the merger process can become very arduous and laborious (Thompson, 2012).

In terms of a geographical contribution, this research has contributed in a significant way to our knowledge of HE mergers in the Irish context, which due to its particular history, legislative and regulatory framework, structure, culture and wider environmental conditions, is worthy of investigation and differentiation from other contexts. Little research has been conducted on mergers in the Irish HE context to date, and my research highlights factors particular to the Irish setting such as the recent economic crisis and resultant lack of resources, unusually high levels of political interference, along with relatively low levels of institutional autonomy, a steering from centre approach to regulation and questionable alignment between national policy, strategy and its implementation, which have led to context specific difficulties and challenges for the three Alliances. This provides a valuable insight into the Irish HE merger and re-designation process and should be of use, not only to Irish HE researchers and practitioners, but also to the wider international HE community.

Finally, this research has made a practical contribution to knowledge by providing guidance for governments, policy makers and legislators on what system level factors can facilitate or inhibit merger processes, thus contributing towards the achievement of national policy objectives. It has also provided guidance to HEIs themselves, who will no doubt come under increasing pressure to merge in near future, on what institutional level factors can contribute towards a successful merger process, and provides specific guidance and recommendations for the three Alliances who formed the basis of this research.

7.4 Reflections & Limitations

As with any piece of research, decisions made at every stage of the process will have an impact upon the final outcome, and leaves the study open to scrutiny and challenge in a number of ways. Firstly, my choice of theoretical frameworks necessarily focused the attention of the study onto certain aspects of the merger process, while perhaps downplaying other aspects which an alternative framework may have considered significant. Unfortunately, the research on mergers in HE largely lacks an accepted theoretical lens which is widely applied. Therefore the frameworks utilised in my study drew broadly upon all leading research in the area, along with theories on change management and micro-political policy and strategy implementation in HE. These theories, along with my own experience of the merger process to date, formed the basis of my interview questions and my initial data analysis. However, while the substantive framework was used as a guide for interview questions, it was no more than that and the loose semi-structured nature of the interviews and the approach to data analysis employed allowed for new themes and insights into merger process in HE to emerge. This is evidenced, for example, by the emergence of the prevalence of political and emotional factors during the process, which the existing literature and frameworks, I argue, do not adequately acknowledge.

In addition to the impact of the theoretical framework on the research, consideration must be given to my research design, along with my methods of data collection and analysis. It is acknowledged that the use of a case study approach may raise issues in relation to external validity and means that caution should be exercised when generalising based on the results outside of the particular context of the study (Bryman and Bell 2003). However, I considered such an approach the most suitable to investigate the ongoing merger phenomenon in the various Alliances in the Irish IoT sector. Had I not adopted a case study approach, and for example, conducted a series of interviews across all the cases and presented the findings, the data would have been entirely without context, at least at an institutional level. As this study shows, there are significant differences between the Alliances which would have been missed in the data had a case study approach not been chosen. Of course, the fact that I conducted three case studies, along with a cross case analysis, meant that the depth of overall analysis possible in any one case was necessarily diluted and it was only possible to present a snapshot of the range of issues which arose in each case in this thesis. While the selection of just one case would have allowed greater depth, it would have limited my ability to compare and contrast findings across the cases.

In relation to data collection, this research relies heavily on documentary data and analysis for context, and for interview data and observations for its findings. The choice of data collection methods was necessarily influenced by the research questions, and other methods, such as questionnaires, for example, were not utilised due to the limited nature of the data which would emerge from such an approach. Due to the relatively short time period within which the research was conducted and the fact that the research was carried out by me individually, it was not possible to conduct a large number of interviews across all of the Alliances and with other actors in the sector. Consequently the data gathered from the eighteen interviews I conducted may not be representative of all or indeed the majority of the senior members of the organisations under investigation. If time and resources allowed, a larger number of interviews would have been conducted in each organisation. A cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal approach to the interviews was chosen, largely for pragmatic reasons around timing and trying to complete this study, but it would certainly be worthwhile to revisit the Alliances in say 12 months' time, to monitor progress and investigate further factors or issues which may have arisen during the merger process. Had a longer time period, of five years for example, been available to conduct this research, then a longitudinal study could have been employed.

When planning the research design, I was apprehensive about the possibility of institutions closing ranks and refusing to participate in the research. Thankfully, this was not my experience, and all were willing and interested in taking part, perhaps partly due to the fact that many appeared to want to share their frustration with what has been a rather slow and laborious process to date. I was also concerned that as the merger and re-designation process is on-going, participants may not have spoken as freely as they would if the process was completed. However, the interviewees all participated voluntarily and in the main, appeared to be open and honest about the issues at hand. As there has been a high degree of friction between the partners in one of the Alliances regarding the merger process, this may have resulted in a more negative view being offered by the interviewees than would otherwise have been the case before the friction arose, or perhaps into the future if trust is established. However, it certainly provided some fascinating insights into what can go wrong during the process which have not been evidenced elsewhere in the HE literature.

My approach to data analysis was structured and rigorous, using the steps outlined in Braun & Clark's (1996) thematic analysis, and utilising NVivo as a data management tool. The various phases of analysis allowed for the development of codes

and themes in an inductive manner, using the frameworks and factors identified from the literature as an initial guide. However, the data analysis developed these into broader themes and categories which were largely absent from the literature to date, allowing a definite contribution to be made. The choice to present findings using both within case and subsequent cross case analysis allowed for rich contextual data on each case to emerge. While this limited the depth of the analysis and findings presented for each case, it also made it possible to compare the data across the cases and to unpick further the key system and institutional level factors which were facilitating or inhibiting the process.

As I hold a management post in one of the IoTs which forms part of one the Alliances under investigation, I was effectively an ‘insider researcher’ (Costley et al, 2010) in respect of that particular case. As a result, I was conscious that the interviewees may have been wary of fully disclosing their real opinions about the merger process. However, all interviewees hold more senior posts than I and were not coerced into participating in the study. Additionally, as I had established strong inter-personal working relationships with the majority of the interviewees within this Alliance, I was satisfied that their motives and disclosures were authentic, and felt that the strong relationship I had built with some of the participants allowed them to speak more openly than might have otherwise been the case. The interview data, I suggest, bears testament to this. My role and experience in working on the early phases of the merger project in that Alliance also allowed me to generate and draw upon my own insights into the merger process to date. It also allowed me to ‘validate’ the observations and findings made by others, and certainly contributed to the findings and recommendations made.

Finally, I must acknowledge that the merger and re-designation process is still ongoing, and flux and change in the sector continued while the research was being conducted, and as I write this conclusion. Volatility and uncertainty continues to surround the composition of Alliances, and indeed, the merger requirement itself, which has come under political scrutiny and may yet be dropped from the proposed Bill. Such environmental flux may mean that emerging factors impacting upon the process have not been captured in the interview data. It also means that it is not possible to measure the ultimate success or failure of the merger projects and to attribute this to various factors. However, this study does not purport to do so. Instead it captures data from and represents a point in time on the journey towards merger and re-designation. It is focused on the process and the factors impacting upon that process, rather than outcomes. Therefore it is not necessary that the mergers be complete for the study to be credible. Rather the study

examined a critical but neglected phase during the merger process, and I would argue that it was both possible and preferable to do this concurrently with the process itself, and that this is evidenced, for example, by the emergence of rich data on aspects of the merger process which other research has not retrospectively evidenced.

7.5 Recommendations & Implications

This research has a number of implications for both theory and practice in the field, which are discussed below.

7.5.1 Recommendations for Further Research

Several key themes for future research emerge from the findings, which could add to the body of knowledge on mergers in HE. These include:

- Developing greater insights into the critical impact of system level factors on the merger process in HE. To this end a comparative analysis of the Irish context with other jurisdictions which have undergone waves of mergers in HE would be particularly useful.
- Further testing of the proposed quinquartite classification of political, strategic, operational, historic and cultural, and emotive factors in HE merger processes.
- Developing our knowledge of the full range of emotive factors which impact upon merger processes in HE, how these can positively or adversely affect the process and how best to manage them to a successful conclusion.
- Developing our knowledge of the full range of political, particularly micro-political factors, which impact upon merger processes in HE, and examining how these can positively or adversely affect the process.
- Further testing of the proposed adapted micro-political system model of HE merger policy formation and implementation, with a particular focus on the use of the model as a tool for identifying and examining why some merger processes succeed and why others fail.

7.5.2 Recommendations & Implications for Practice

In addition to theoretical recommendations, the findings of this research also have clear implications for both institutional and system level actors who are planning or involved in merger processes in HE. Recommendations for each individual Alliance have

already been presented in the within case analysis for each Alliance (see Chapter 5 – Sections 5.2.5, 5.3.5 and 5.4.5). On a broader level, there are some important considerations and recommendations which derive from my findings.

I would make the following recommendations for practice at institutional level:

- Firstly, institutional leaders who are planning to merge or who have begun the process must be absolutely credible, trusted and committed and must believe in and be passionate about the merger project. They must be able to espouse the need for change and influence and incentivise others at all levels of their organisation to come on board with the proposal. The leaders must manage the micro-politics of the merger and must ensure that they have their executive team on board.
- Secondly the leaders must focus on building and maintaining strong working relationships between key actors in the merging HEIs, starting at leadership level and working down through the senior executive other management teams. Relationships must be based on trust, honesty, openness, respect, empathy and understanding. This aspect of the process cannot be underestimated, and this research has shown evidence of the draconian consequences of the failure to establish and build trust. Too strong a focus on process, to the neglect of the people element of the merger, is not advisable.
- All mergers will involve power plays of some kind, and compromise. Acknowledgement of and respect for differences in the merging institutions histories, identities, relative sizes and trajectories is absolutely key. Smaller partners will likely need greater reassurances about future plans and actions.
- Early and regular communication, consultation and engagement with staff and staff representatives in relation to the project is critical. The emotions experienced by those involved in and subject to the merger process are quite powerful and these feelings, which can range from fear, insecurity, frustration, uncertainty and suspicion, are natural and should be acknowledged, discussed and addressed. The earlier assurances can be given to staff regarding contracts, remuneration, place of work, etc., the better.
- Institutions must ensure that they provide the necessary financial and human resources for the merger. A decision to merge is likely to be the most significant strategic decision a HEI will make, and needs to be prioritised and

resourced as such. It is important to get the right project managers and teams in situ and operating as soon as possible once the process begins.

- There should be interrogation and resolution of possible cultural differences or issues at an early stage in the process. Ideally both partners should be committed to creating a new culture in the new institution.
- If others in the sector are undergoing a similar process, a network of merging institutions, which can share experience and advice, and collectively lobby system level actors, should be formed.
- Finally, it is critical that momentum is built and maintained throughout the process, that clear deadlines are set and adhered to and that the process is as stable as possible. Timing is of the essence, and the longer the process continues, the more time is provided for challengers to build opposition to the merger, and for participants to become frustrated and lose belief in and passion for the project.

As this study clearly shows, even if institutional leaders play their part during the process, inhibitors at system level can nonetheless make the process extremely difficult. Therefore I propose the following recommendations for system level actors, whether they are relevant politicians, the Department of Education & Skills and/or the HEA:

- Before the process begins, there must be clarity and certainty around the desired HE system configuration and alignment between the policy, strategy and implementers about how best to achieve it.
- It should be clear to institutions what the objective(s) of the process are. For example, is it to create new universities, or is to secure cost savings and rationalisations in the sector, due to a difficult economic climate? By collapsing differing agendas into one process, the waters get muddied and it allows detractors to build opposition.
- Certainty, clarity and transparency must also be provided around the prescribed merger process, stages and criteria (if any) and the paradigm of the desired new model of HEI to be created.
- If legislative amendments or a new legislative framework is required, it should be provided for early as possible, and preferably before, the process starts. The legislative framework must be suitable for the needs of the new type of HEI proposed.

- There is wide acknowledgement that mergers require a significant amount of investment, and if mergers are an important part of national HE policy and strategy, then institutions must be provided with necessary financial resources to successfully navigate the process.
- System level actors also have a critical role to play as regards providing advice, support and facilitation mechanisms for merging institutions, particularly around contentious national issues, such as staffing and IR matters.
- Finally, there is a need for consistency in approach and communication from all system level actors, who need to have one voice when it comes to the process.

In the Irish context, some immediate steps must be taken if the proposed mergers are to progress successfully. It is imperative that the legislation be enacted immediately to provide clarity and certainty and that additional financial resources are made available to the merging institutions as a matter of priority. IR issues, particularly the issue of staff contracts, must also be addressed at system level if any progress is to be made. Without these immediate steps, the merger process across all three Alliances will be in real danger of collapsing.

7.6 Conclusion

To conclude, my research has found that the merger process in the Irish IoT sector is highly political and emotive process, which is both complex and ambiguous. It has identified and classified the wide range of political, strategic, operational, historic and cultural, and emotive factors which are impacting upon the process to date. This research argues that it is these political and emotive factors, rather than strategic or operational considerations, which are often most the powerful. The findings demonstrate the need for leaders of merging institutions to be cognisant of and to operate across all dimensions discussed above, on both a formal and an informal basis, and of the critical need to build relationship based on trust, honest, understanding, respect and empathy between the partners.

My research has also provided an excellent example of the challenges involved in merging HEIs when some of the expected system level supports are lacking, including the legislative framework, sufficient funding, and clarity and certainty around the

process, stages and criteria. The lack of alignment between system level actors and the institutions themselves in terms of desired outcomes, and the collapsing of various differing agendas into one merger process, has led to significant difficulties in the sector. The failure of government to recognise that the creation of larger HEIs does not necessarily have to be achieved through merger has remained a constant difficulty throughout and has led the institutions on a reluctant journey through uncertain waters.

Finally, my research has identified the micro-political phases or steps through which HE mergers must proceed, and proposes an adapted model which may be of use in identifying the factors which might ultimately lead to success or failure on the part of HEIs.

While we await the final outcome of the Irish process, it is clear that lessons can be learned from experience to date, not just for the three Alliances who formed part of this research, but for others, both in Irish and international HE, who will undoubtedly undertake similar journeys into the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

DBA (Higher Education Management) Research Project:

Facilitatory and Inhibitory Factors in Higher Education Mergers

Interviewer: Allison Kenneally

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Nature and Purpose of Study:

This research aims to provide a contemporaneous account of how the Irish IoTs are organising themselves for merger and examines the substantial challenges which lie therein. This research aims to identify the key factors which facilitate on one hand, and/or inhibit on the other, the merger process in HE, both at a system and institutional level. This knowledge will be useful to policy makers and other higher education institutions, particularly in Ireland's IoT sector, which is likely to experience a wave of mergers over the coming decade.

Research Design

In order to address the question, I have designed a qualitative study, employing a multiple case study approach, which will investigate the facilitatory and inhibitory factors across Alliances of Irish IoTs who are proposing to merge, through document analysis, interview and the use of audio and visual materials.

Data Protection & Confidentiality

This interview is voluntary, confidential and anonymous in nature. You will not be named or in any other way identified, directly or indirectly, or associated with any institution in my research. All information gathered will be used for the purposes of private research only. Once my research is completed and the data is no longer required for the purposes of any associated examination, the data will be destroyed, again in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1998-2003.

Declaration of Consent by Interviewee: _____

Interview Guide

Origin of the Merger Proposal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about the Alliance –
 - why was it formed?
 - how was it formed?
 - when was it formed?
2. What is the key driver(s) behind the proposed merger? (Political, strategic, financial and other drivers at play?) Were these drivers primarily internal or external?
3. Were any alternatives to a full merger considered by the Alliance? If so, what alternatives were considered? If not, why?
4. Was there a history of previous co-operation, and collaboration between the partners, or was the relationship a competitive one? Can you give some examples? What impact, if any, has this had on the process?
5. Were specific steps taken to establish and build trust and understanding between the partners when the Alliance was formed, or was it taken for granted that it already existed?

Organising the Merger Process

6. How has the Alliance gone about organising itself for the merger process?
 - What groups or structures have been put in place by the Alliance to further the merger proposal and how have these worked in practice?
 - What physical or human resources were allocated to the process and how were these secured? Were or are any other resources required?
 - Are the arrangements effective from your point of view? If you were starting again now would you have sought to set up different structures for taking the proposal forwards? If so, what would they be?
 - Were any external consultants/change agents brought in to support the project? If so, at what stage did they become involved? What role have they played in the process? Has it been positive or negative? Can you give some examples?
7. How has the Alliance progressed through the 4 stage merger and TU process outlined by the HEA?

- At what stage of the process is the Alliance now?
 - Is this broadly in line with that was envisaged at the beginning of the project or have timelines accelerated or slowed down? If so, why and what impact has this delay had on the process?
 - What was your experience of the other stages (initial proposal, business plan, evaluation by international panel)? What difficulties or issues, did you encounter during this process, either with the preparation of the business plan, or the evaluation of the plan?
 - Was a due diligence exercise completed? If yes, when? If not, when is it likely to happen? What issues would you expect to be covered in the Due Diligence?
8. To what extent has the Alliance engaged in consultation with various bodies/groups during the process (e.g. staff, students, management team, Trade Unions, Regional Industry, Politicians, etc.?) Has this benefited or hindered the process? Can you give some examples?
 9. What role, if any, has the Academic Council and Governing Body played in the process?
 10. What role, if any, have local and/or national politicians played in the process?

Role of Government/Government Agencies/Legislators

11. From a system perspective, to what extent has the government/government agencies/national legislators supported you through process?
12. What government/HEA measures or actions have helped the Alliance through the process?
13. What additional supports or clarifications could they have provided which would have helped the process?
14. Do you think the proposed legislative framework allows enough autonomy for the creation of truly entrepreneurial TUs?

Facilitatory Factors/Success to Date

15. What has worked well with the process to date?
16. What major milestones/successes has the Alliance achieved

Inhibitory Factors/Challenges

17. Did the Alliance experience any major difficulties and potential deal-breaking issues?
 - If so, what were they and at what stage of the process did they arise?
 - Had these issues been anticipated?
 - Did these issues arise as a result of internal or external factors?
 - How were these issues overcome?
 - With hindsight could these difficulties have been anticipated and circumvented, and if so how?
18. What other key challenges did the Alliance during the process to date? Could these have been avoided and how?

Group Dynamics

19. Have any noticeable cultural differences emerged between the partners to date, and if so, how have these been dealt with?
20. Have any issues regarding actual or perceived power imbalance emerged between the partners to date, and if so, how have these been dealt with?
21. Have the partners differed in regard to project timescales and what impact, if any, has this had on the process?
22. Have blocking or delaying tactics been used by the partners at any stage? Can you give any examples?
23. How have the relationships between Presidents and Chairs, both between and within institutions, impacted upon the process?

Benefits/Costs

24. Have there been any benefits to your organisation accruing from the merger process even though the merger has not yet gone ahead?
25. Have there been any negative outcomes to your organisation accruing from the merger process to date?
26. Have there been any negative outcomes/ramifications for subsequent collaboration and more generally for the relationship between the two institutions arising from the merger process to date?

Wrap up

27. What are you most apprehensive about for the remainder of the process? What challenges lie ahead?
28. If you were offering advice to a new Alliance starting the process, what would it be?

Appendix 2 – Within Case Description Outline

Explain how and why the Alliance was formed (Focusing on drivers for the process – political, strategic, financial and other; partner choice; type/classification of merger, other alternatives to merger/current partner?)

Explain how the Alliances have organised themselves for the proposed merger and what progress has been made to date? (Focusing on process, structures, resources, timelines, milestones, project management, consultation; vision and mission, business planning and due diligence)

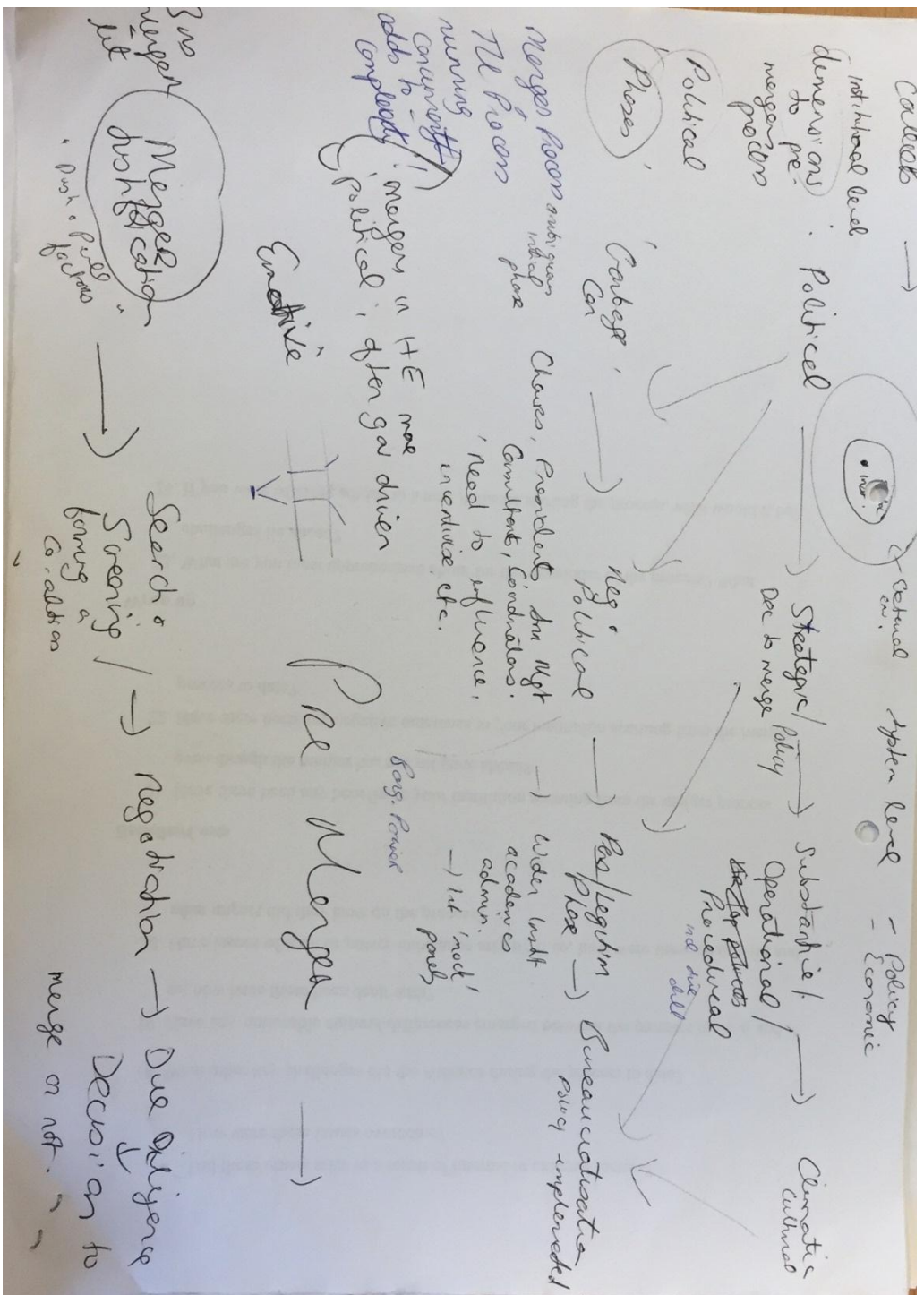
Explain who the key actors in the process are and what their role has been during the process? (e.g. Govt., national and local politicians, management teams, external consultants, institute staff, unions, external stakeholders)

Discuss the key challenges which the Alliance has faced/is facing during the merger process and how have these impacted upon the process? (Focus on prior relationship between the partners/history of collaboration, cultural issues, relationships, supports from govt. and other CSF's for mergers)

In particular, focus in the interviews on:

- importance of maintaining momentum and stability throughout the process
- roles which external consultants/ change agents helpful? If so, how? Negative aspects
- key role of government/government agencies/national legislators in the process
- how was trust established, or was it, and how was eroded
- research aims to make a theoretical contribution on the political dimension of HE mergers, which to date has been largely neglected by the literature.

Appendix 3 –Data Analysis Phase 1 – Initial Themes/Concepts



Appendix 4 –Data Analysis Phase 2– Initial Open Coding

DBA Thesis.mvp - NVivo Pro

FILE HOME CREATE DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

Go Refresh Open Properties Edit Paste Merge Copy Cut

Workspace Item Clipboard Format Paragraph Styles Editing Proofing

Nodes

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (Open Coding)

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|---|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Process & Project Planning | 17 | 132 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:43 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Lack of Government, HEA and Dept Support, Understanding and Clarity | 17 | 127 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:42 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Feelings of uncertainty, ambiguity, lack of control, fear and frustration | 15 | 118 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:45 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Political Input | 18 | 112 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:14 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Good Quotes | 17 | 110 | AK | 05/01/2016 12:50 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Distrust, Suspicion, Dishonesty, Antagonism, Lack of Openness | 16 | 96 | AK | 06/01/2016 13:17 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| The Balance of Power | 16 | 93 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:35 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Building Relationships based on Trust & Honesty | 16 | 84 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:49 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Lack of Resources | 14 | 78 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:40 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Role of External Consultants & Facilitators | 15 | 74 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:39 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Communicating with, Consulting & Engaging Staff | 16 | 72 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:56 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Role of and Relationship between Key People in the Organisations | 15 | 68 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:59 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Cultural Issues, Values and Identity | 15 | 65 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:34 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Leadership & Charisma | 16 | 64 | AK | 22/03/2016 13:03 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Importance of Getting Executive Team on Board and Unified | 11 | 63 | AK | 07/01/2016 13:59 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Building and Maintaining Momentum | 13 | 60 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:57 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Commitment | 14 | 57 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:20 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Technological University as Driver for Merger | 16 | 56 | AK | 05/01/2016 12:16 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Blocking, Delaying Tactics & 'Game Playing' | 10 | 45 | AK | 06/01/2016 14:18 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Political dimensions | 8 | 45 | AK | 07/01/2016 14:02 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Selecting Partners | 14 | 42 | AK | 05/01/2016 12:14 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |

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Nodes

Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (Open Coding)

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|---|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Selecting Partners | 14 | 42 | AK | 05/01/2016 12:14 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Impact of National Strategy | 13 | 42 | AK | 05/01/2016 12:21 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Role of Governing Body | 14 | 38 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:12 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Strategic Issues | 15 | 37 | AK | 06/01/2016 13:15 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Industrial Relations Issues | 15 | 36 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:46 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Use of Analogies | 10 | 36 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:53 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Name and Organisational Design of the New Institution | 12 | 36 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:03 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Historic Relationship between the Partners | 12 | 35 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:36 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Respect, Equality, Parity of Esteem | 9 | 31 | AK | 09/01/2016 12:34 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Inflexibility of Boundary and Operating Conditions within the Irish Public Sector | 8 | 30 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:05 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Vision & Mission | 9 | 29 | AK | 22/03/2016 14:32 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Regional Impact | 13 | 27 | AK | 06/01/2016 12:46 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Creation of Efficiencies & Rationalisation | 14 | 26 | AK | 06/01/2016 12:40 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Establishing the Need for Change | 9 | 23 | AK | 06/01/2016 13:24 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Due Diligence - Financial and Legal Issues | 12 | 22 | AK | 06/01/2016 12:50 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Lack of Alignment | 8 | 22 | C | 24/03/2016 16:28 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Economic Climate | 8 | 20 | AK | 06/01/2016 13:04 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Reputational Impact of Merger on Institutions | 11 | 19 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:28 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Academic Case for Merger | 8 | 15 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:29 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Opposition from Existing Universities | 9 | 15 | AK | 07/01/2016 18:04 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Structures | 7 | 14 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:47 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |

53 Items

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FILE HOME CREATE DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

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Workspace Item Clipboard

Look for Search In Phase 2 - Gener Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Nodes

- Nodes
 - Phase 2 - Generating Initial Codes (Open Coding)

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|--|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Structures | 7 | 14 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:47 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Nature of Irish IoT's and or HEI's | 5 | 14 | AK | 06/01/2016 13:21 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Academic Reputation | 7 | 14 | AK | 07/01/2016 13:49 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Positive benefits for HEI's from process | 4 | 14 | C | 29/03/2016 14:08 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Perspective on History | 6 | 12 | AK | 05/01/2016 12:11 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Timelines | 6 | 12 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:22 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Training and Support for Executive Team and Managers | 7 | 12 | AK | 06/01/2016 13:07 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Lack of Co-operation Across the IoT Sector | 5 | 12 | AK | 06/01/2016 13:27 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Role of Academic Council | 5 | 11 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:11 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Engagement with Stakeholder in the Wider Region | 5 | 10 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:17 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Alternatives to Merger | 7 | 9 | AK | 05/01/2016 14:34 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Institutional Stasis during Process | 3 | 4 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:25 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Opportunity Cost | 3 | 4 | AK | 05/01/2016 15:26 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
- Cases
- Relationships
- Node Matrices
- Sources
- Classifications
- Collections
- Queries
- Reports
- Maps
- Folders

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Appendix 5 –Data Analysis Phase 3– Reorganisation and Categorisation of Initial Codes

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Nodes

Phase 3 - Searching for Themes (Developing Categories)

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|-----------------------------|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Political Factors | 18 | 856 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:08 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:42 |
| Operational Factors | 18 | 758 | AK | 05/05/2016 14:26 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:42 |
| Emotive Factors | 18 | 453 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:08 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Strategic Factors | 18 | 390 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:09 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:45 |
| Historic & Cultural Factors | 18 | 206 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:09 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:47 |

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Nodes

Phase 3 - Searching for Themes (Developing Categories)

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|--|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Political Factors | 18 | 856 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:08 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:42 |
| Micro Political Factors | 17 | 433 | C | 28/05/2016 12:03 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:43 |
| Power Dynamics & Negotiations between | 16 | 91 | C | 07/05/2016 12:29 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:40 |
| Getting Support from the wider Academ | 16 | 72 | AK | 30/05/2016 11:27 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:43 |
| Relationships between Key People | 15 | 68 | C | 07/05/2016 12:25 | AK | 30/05/2016 12:01 |
| Securing the Support of the Senior Exec | 12 | 66 | C | 07/05/2016 12:10 | AK | 30/05/2016 12:02 |
| Leadership & Charisma | 16 | 64 | C | 28/05/2016 12:04 | AK | 30/05/2016 10:39 |
| Blocking, Delaying Tactics & 'Game Playi | 10 | 44 | C | 07/05/2016 11:40 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:34 |
| Establishing the Need for Change | 9 | 22 | AK | 30/05/2016 11:23 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:43 |
| Internally Political nature of IoT's | 1 | 6 | AK | 30/05/2016 11:58 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:43 |
| Macro Political Factors | 18 | 422 | C | 28/05/2016 12:03 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:43 |
| The Political Landscape | 18 | 247 | C | 29/05/2016 11:58 | C | 31/05/2016 11:05 |
| Lack of Govt, HEA and Dept Support, Co | 17 | 126 | C | 31/05/2016 11:08 | C | 28/05/2016 14:47 |
| Regional Stakeholders | 15 | 35 | C | 07/05/2016 12:22 | C | 31/05/2016 13:36 |
| Opposition from Existing Universities | 9 | 14 | C | 07/05/2016 12:19 | C | 31/05/2016 11:30 |
| Operational Factors | 18 | 758 | AK | 05/05/2016 14:26 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:42 |
| Emotive Factors | 18 | 453 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:08 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Strategic Factors | 18 | 390 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:09 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:45 |
| Historic & Cultural Factors | 18 | 206 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:09 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:47 |

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Nodes

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Phase 3 - Searching for Themes (Developing Categories)

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|---|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Operational Factors | 18 | 758 | AK | 05/05/2016 14:26 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:42 |
| Process & Project Planning | 17 | 131 | AK | 05/05/2016 14:27 | C | 28/05/2016 13:27 |
| Lack of Govt, HEA and Dept Support, Com | 17 | 126 | C | 07/05/2016 12:13 | C | 28/05/2016 14:47 |
| Role of External Consultants & Facilitators | 15 | 73 | C | 07/05/2016 12:26 | C | 14/05/2016 10:45 |
| Communicating with, Consulting & Engagi | 16 | 72 | C | 07/05/2016 11:44 | C | 14/05/2016 11:49 |
| Resources | 14 | 72 | C | 07/05/2016 12:15 | C | 11/05/2016 20:06 |
| Building and Maintaining Momentum & St | 13 | 59 | C | 07/05/2016 11:40 | C | 28/05/2016 11:57 |
| Industrial Relations Issues | 15 | 36 | C | 07/05/2016 12:10 | C | 14/05/2016 10:54 |
| Role of Governing Body | 14 | 36 | C | 07/05/2016 12:27 | C | 10/05/2016 20:03 |
| Name, Governance and Management Struc | 11 | 34 | C | 28/05/2016 13:44 | C | 09/05/2016 19:06 |
| Due Diligence & Risk Assessment | 12 | 21 | C | 07/05/2016 11:49 | C | 28/05/2016 13:00 |
| Structures | 8 | 19 | C | 07/05/2016 12:28 | C | 14/05/2016 14:01 |
| Reputational Impact of Merger on Institutio | 11 | 18 | C | 07/05/2016 12:24 | C | 11/05/2016 19:13 |
| Positive benefits for HEI's from process | 3 | 13 | C | 07/05/2016 12:22 | C | 11/05/2016 20:12 |
| Role of Academic Council | 5 | 11 | C | 07/05/2016 12:25 | C | 10/05/2016 19:39 |
| Training and Support for Executive Team an | 6 | 11 | C | 07/05/2016 12:29 | C | 10/05/2016 18:40 |
| Lack of Co-operation Across the IoT Secto | 4 | 11 | C | 11/05/2016 20:21 | C | 11/05/2016 20:22 |
| Engagement with Stakeholder in the Wider | 4 | 9 | C | 07/05/2016 12:02 | C | 10/05/2016 20:14 |
| Opportunity Cost | 3 | 3 | C | 07/05/2016 12:18 | C | 10/05/2016 18:53 |
| Institutional Stasis during Process | 1 | 2 | C | 07/05/2016 12:12 | C | 10/05/2016 18:53 |

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FILE HOME CREATE DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

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Nodes

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Phase 3 - Searching for Themes (Developing Categories)

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|--|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Emotive Factors | 18 | 453 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:08 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Uncertainty, Ambiguity, Insecurity, Fear and | 15 | 115 | C | 07/05/2016 12:01 | C | 14/05/2016 10:01 |
| Distrust, Suspicion, Hostility & Resentment, | 16 | 94 | C | 07/05/2016 11:49 | C | 14/05/2016 09:59 |
| Trust, Honesty & Understanding | 16 | 88 | C | 07/05/2016 11:41 | C | 14/05/2016 09:58 |
| Role of and Relationship between Key Peop | 15 | 68 | C | 07/05/2016 12:26 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Commitment, Belief and Passion | 14 | 57 | C | 07/05/2016 11:43 | C | 14/05/2016 09:59 |
| Respect, Equality, Parity of Esteem | 8 | 30 | C | 07/05/2016 12:25 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Strategic Factors | 18 | 390 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:09 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:45 |
| Historic & Cultural Factors | 18 | 206 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:09 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:47 |

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FILE HOME CREATE DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

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- Phase 3 - Searching for T
- Phase 4 - Reviewing The
- Phase 5 - Defining and N
- Phase 6 - Creating Analyt
- Cases
- Relationships
- Node Matrices
- Sources
- Classifications
- Collections
- Queries
- Reports
- Maps
- Folders

Phase 3 - Searching for Themes (Developing Categories)

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|---|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Strategic Factors | 18 | 390 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:09 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:45 |
| University Designation as Driver for Merger | 16 | 56 | C | 07/05/2016 12:28 | C | 09/05/2016 18:47 |
| National Strategy | 13 | 41 | C | 07/05/2016 12:09 | C | 09/05/2016 18:34 |
| Selecting Partners | 14 | 41 | C | 07/05/2016 12:27 | AK | 09/05/2016 15:22 |
| Strategic Environment | 14 | 36 | AK | 05/05/2016 16:33 | C | 09/05/2016 18:42 |
| Name, Governance and Management Struc | 11 | 34 | C | 07/05/2016 12:21 | C | 09/05/2016 19:06 |
| Vision & Mission | 9 | 28 | C | 07/05/2016 12:30 | AK | 09/05/2016 14:48 |
| Regional Impact | 13 | 27 | C | 07/05/2016 12:22 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:50 |
| Creation of Efficiencies & Rationalisation | 13 | 26 | C | 07/05/2016 11:48 | AK | 09/05/2016 12:55 |
| Establishing the Need for Change | 9 | 22 | C | 07/05/2016 12:08 | AK | 09/05/2016 15:03 |
| Lack of Alignment | 8 | 22 | C | 07/05/2016 12:12 | AK | 09/05/2016 14:55 |
| Economic Climate | 8 | 19 | C | 07/05/2016 12:01 | AK | 09/05/2016 12:59 |
| Academic Case for Merger | 7 | 14 | C | 07/05/2016 11:35 | AK | 09/05/2016 11:02 |
| Academic Reputation | 7 | 14 | C | 07/05/2016 11:36 | AK | 09/05/2016 11:12 |
| Alternatives to Merger | 7 | 9 | C | 07/05/2016 11:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 12:32 |
| Historic & Cultural Factors | 18 | 206 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:09 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:47 |

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- Phase 3 - Searching for T
- Phase 4 - Reviewing The
- Phase 5 - Defining and N
- Phase 6 - Creating Analyt
- Cases
- Relationships
- Node Matrices
- Sources
- Classifications
- Collections
- Queries
- Reports
- Maps
- Folders

Phase 3 - Searching for Themes (Developing Categories)

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|---|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Historic & Cultural Factors | 18 | 206 | AK | 05/05/2016 15:09 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:47 |
| Cultural Issues, Values and Identity | 15 | 65 | AK | 05/05/2016 16:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:48 |
| Historic Relationship between the Partners | 12 | 32 | C | 07/05/2016 12:09 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:48 |
| Inflexibility of Boundary and Operating Con | 8 | 30 | C | 07/05/2016 12:11 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:48 |
| Regional Focus | 13 | 26 | C | 07/05/2016 12:23 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:42 |
| Nature of Irish IoT's | 7 | 15 | C | 07/05/2016 12:18 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:48 |
| Academic Reputation | 7 | 14 | C | 07/05/2016 11:36 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:48 |
| Perspective on History | 6 | 12 | C | 07/05/2016 12:19 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:48 |
| Lack of Co-operation Across the IoT Secto | 4 | 11 | C | 07/05/2016 12:13 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:48 |

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Appendix 6 –Data Analysis Phase 4 – Coding On

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Nodes Look for Search In Phase 4 - Reviewing Themes (Drilling Down) Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Nodes

- Phase 2 - Generating Initial
- Phase 3 - Searching for Themes
- Phase 4 - Reviewing Themes (Drilling Down)
- Phase 5 - Defining and Naming
- Phase 6 - Creating Analytical

Cases

- Cases
- Relationships
- Node Matrices

Sources

Classifications

Collections

Queries

Reports

Maps

Folders

393 Items

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|---|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Political Factors | 18 | 830 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:42 |
| Macro Political Factors | 18 | 424 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:43 |
| Micro Political Factors | 17 | 405 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:43 |
| Power Dynamics & Negotiations between | 16 | 91 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:40 |
| Power Plays between Merging Institutions | 8 | 20 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:24 |
| Academic Reputation | 9 | 17 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:10 |
| Concern about losing autonomy and | 10 | 17 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:26 |
| Perceived Arrogance or Superiority | 9 | 14 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:24 |
| Individual Power Plays & Self Promotion | 6 | 14 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:37 |
| Providing Reassurance to Smaller Partners | 5 | 10 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:25 |
| Smaller Institutions attempting to | 3 | 9 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:26 |
| Differences in Size of Merging Institutions | 5 | 8 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:25 |
| Unwillingness to Acknowledge Part | 2 | 7 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:22 |
| Larger Partner Exercising 'power' over | 4 | 5 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:23 |
| Difficulties due to 'A Merger of Equals' | 4 | 4 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:09 |
| Ensuring Equality & Parity of Esteem | 3 | 3 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:18 |
| The fewer the better... | 1 | 1 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 14:46 |
| Getting Support from the wider Academic | 16 | 72 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:43 |
| Relationships between Key People | 15 | 68 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 12:01 |
| Securing the Support of the Senior Executives | 12 | 66 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 30/05/2016 12:02 |

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Nodes Look for Search In Phase 4 - Reviewing Themes (Drilling Down) Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Nodes

- Phase 2 - Generating Initial
- Phase 3 - Searching for Themes
- Phase 4 - Reviewing Themes (Drilling Down)
- Phase 5 - Defining and Naming
- Phase 6 - Creating Analytical

Cases

- Cases
- Relationships
- Node Matrices

Sources

Classifications

Collections

Queries

Reports

Maps

Folders

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| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|---|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Emotive Factors | 18 | 390 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Interpersonal Emotions | 18 | 212 | AK | 07/06/2016 13:23 | AK | 07/06/2016 13:43 |
| Distrust, Suspicion, Hostility & Resentment | 16 | 94 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | C | 14/05/2016 09:59 |
| Distrust between Organisations | 10 | 32 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Paranoia, Conspiracy, Rumour and | 10 | 16 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Dishonesty or 'Game Playing' | 3 | 13 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Distrust within Organisation | 5 | 6 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Antagonism | 5 | 5 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Distrust of Government or System Level | 4 | 4 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Acceptance that Some Degree of | 3 | 4 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | C | 03/06/2016 14:33 |
| Hostility | 4 | 4 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Resentment | 3 | 4 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Trust, Honesty & Understanding | 16 | 88 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | C | 14/05/2016 09:58 |
| Importance of Building Strong | 8 | 25 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:45 |
| Honesty & Openness | 7 | 13 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:45 |
| Trust | 6 | 12 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Trust at Leadership Level | 7 | 9 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Initiatives to Build Trust | 7 | 8 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |
| Re-building Trust | 1 | 5 | C | 31/05/2016 12:38 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:46 |

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Appendix 7 –Data Analysis Phase 5 – Data Reduction

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Workspace Item Clipboard

Nodes

Look for Search In Phase 5 - Defini Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Phase 5 - Defining and Naming Themes (Data Reduction - Developing a Thematic Framework)

| Name | Sources | References | Created By | Created On | Modified By | Modified On |
|--|---------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Political Factors | 18 | 699 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:42 |
| Micro Political Factors | 17 | 405 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:43 |
| Macro Political Factors | 18 | 293 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | C | 20/07/2016 10:25 |
| Operational Factors | 18 | 562 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 30/05/2016 15:42 |
| Project Structures, Planning, Resources & Ti | 18 | 302 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 07/06/2016 13:54 |
| Role of Key Actors | 15 | 120 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 07/06/2016 13:55 |
| Communicating with Staff and IR Issues | 16 | 108 | AK | 01/07/2016 13:05 | C | 02/07/2016 17:54 |
| Engagement & Support | 11 | 31 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 01/07/2016 13:04 |
| Emotive Factors | 18 | 390 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | C | 07/05/2016 12:20 |
| Interpersonal Emotions | 18 | 212 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 07/06/2016 13:43 |
| Personal Emotions | 17 | 177 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 07/06/2016 13:43 |
| Strategic Factors | 18 | 332 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:45 |
| Drivers & the Case for Merger | 17 | 168 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 07/06/2016 13:44 |
| Making Key Strategic Choices | 17 | 103 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 07/06/2016 13:44 |
| The Strategic Environment | 17 | 60 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 07/06/2016 13:44 |
| Historic & Cultural Factors | 18 | 206 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 09/05/2016 10:47 |
| Cultural Factors | 18 | 150 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 07/06/2016 13:46 |
| Historic Factors | 13 | 55 | AK | 01/07/2016 12:43 | AK | 07/06/2016 13:46 |

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**Appendix 8 – Detailed Classification of Facilitatory & Inhibitory Factors
Impacting upon Merger & Re-designation Process**

| POLITICAL FACTORS | | |
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| Subset | Grouping | Factor |
| Macro-Political | The Political Landscape | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Political 'Push' or Support ○ Programme for Government 2011 ○ Importance of Key Political Actors ○ TU Policy as a political response to bids for University Status ○ Need to Understand and 'Manage' the Political Landscape • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Changing Political Landscape and Uncertainty ○ Declining Political Support ○ Failure to Prioritise HE ○ Leaders 'Playing Along' with the Department & Politicians ○ Political Apathy ○ Political 'Control' of IoTs ○ Political Interference, Disruption and 'Playing Politics' ○ Unrealistic Expectations from Politicians and Govt. |
| | Opposition from 'Traditional' Universities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fear of Competition & Reduced Funding ○ Universities Lobbying Against, Opposing and Attacking TU Policy ○ University Representation on Board of HEA ○ Universities Using Political Pull to ensure as few as possible new TUs |
| | Lack of Govt./Dept./HEA Commitment, Supports, Understanding & Clarity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEA & Dept. Supportive of the Process • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure to Address Issues regarding Staff Contracts ○ Failure to enact necessary Legislation ○ Failure to Provide Funding Mechanisms ○ Failure to Prioritise Merger Project ○ Failure to Provide Advice Mechanisms to Institutions ○ Failure to Provide Clarity around Process & Criteria ○ 'Hands Off' Disinterested approach from HEA & Department ○ Inconsistency or Dishonesty of behaviour of HEA & Dept. ○ Interference by the HEA in its own Processes ○ Lack of Alignment between HEA and Department & Government Objectives ○ Lack of Support or Funds to the HEA from Govt. ○ Lack of Understanding by the HEA or Dept. ○ The need for a more open dialogue |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Unclear Policy Drivers |
| | Support & Pressure from Regional Stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pressure from Local & Regional Stakeholders ○ Need to build a support network of local and regional stakeholders ○ Desire to Maintain Regional or Local Presence ○ Changing Stakeholder Perceptions |
| Micro-Political | Power Dynamics & Negotiations between Merging Institutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Differences in Academic Reputation ○ Concern about losing autonomy and power by being 'Taken Over' or 'Swallowed Up' ○ Differences in Size of Merging Institutions ○ Difficulties due to 'A Merger of Equals' ○ Individual Power Plays & Self Promotion ○ Larger Partner Exercising 'power' over Smaller Partner ○ Perceived Arrogance or Superiority of Larger Institution ○ Power Plays between Merging Institutions ○ Unwillingness to Acknowledge Partners Strengths or Identify Own Weaknesses ○ Smaller Institutions attempting to Strengthen Bargaining Position • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensuring Equality & Parity of Esteem ○ Providing Reassurance to Smaller Partner through integration agreements, equality of representation, etc. ○ The fewer the better... |
| | Leadership & Charisma | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Importance of Charismatic Leaders ○ Importance of Commitment and Leadership from the Top ○ Importance of Leader selecting, using and rewarding Champions and 'Spies' in the organisation ○ Importance of Stability in Leadership ○ Importance of Strong Leadership ○ Integrity and Credibility ○ Loyalty to the Organisation ○ Necessity for Leaders to be able to Influence and Manipulate others in the organisation ○ Necessity of using Political Power & Networks due to Non-Hierarchical nature of HEIs ○ Need to 'Sell' the Message to the Academy ○ 'Tailoring' the Message for Specific Audiences • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Disruption and Instability due to Change of Leadership ○ Distrust of Leader ○ Failure to Bring the Academy on Board ○ Leaders 'Playing Along' with the Department & Politicians ○ Personal Ambition |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Poor Leadership |
| | Relationships between Key People in the Merging Organisations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Importance of 'Informal' Personal Relationships ○ Importance of Key People Agreeing Mutually Beneficial Terms for the Future ○ Importance of Strong Relationship between Presidents based on Trust, Respect & Parity of Esteem ○ Importance of Strong Relationships between Steering Groups or Implementation Teams ○ Important to 'Show Unity' at Highest Levels • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Disruption & Instability due to Change of Leadership ○ Problematic Personal Relationships between Key People |
| | Securing the Support of the Internal Senior Executive Team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Supportive Executive Team ○ Criticality of getting Senior Executive Team on Board ○ Strategically Limiting Input of Senior Executive Team ○ Need to Conduct an Analysis of Senior Executive Team to determine which Incentives or Levers to Use ○ Need to Identify and Use Credible, Respected, Knowledgeable Champions who support the merger ○ Need to Identify, Isolate, Side-line or Remove Problematic People at Senior Level ○ Need to 'Incentivise' Senior Executives ○ Need to Negotiate & Agree about Senior Posts in new Organisation at an early stage • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Difficulties with Disunity in Senior Executive Teams ○ Failure of Leader to get Senior Executive Team on Board ○ Failure to Communicate satisfactorily with Senior Team ○ Senior Executive Team Resistance to Merger |
| | Securing the Support of the wider Academy and Administrative Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Different Communication Strategies for management vs administrative vs academic staff ○ Importance of Early Communication or Consultation • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Different Communication Strategies for management vs administrative vs academic staff ○ Failure to Consult or Communicate within Institution ○ Failure to get Wider Staff Involved or Engaged in the Process ○ Importance of Early Communication or Consultation ○ Inability to Provide Clarity to Staff ○ Secrecy or Lack of Information |

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| | Blocking & Delaying Tactics & 'Game Playing' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Blaming each other for Delays ○ Break Down in Negotiations ○ Employing Diversionary or Delaying Tactics ○ 'Game Playing' and 'Box Ticking' ○ Two-ing and Frow-ing during Negotiations ○ Undermining the Process as a 'Way Out' |
| STRATEGIC FACTORS | | |
| Subset | Grouping | Factor |
| The Strategic Environment | Impact of National Strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus on IoTs not Universities ○ Imperative for Mergers & Restructuring ○ Enhanced Collaboration & Clustering ○ Mission Specificity and Institutional Diversity ○ Strategic Dialogue linked to Funding ○ National Strategy & TUs to address the clamour for University Status |
| | Economic Climate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Financial Challenges ○ Need to Secure Financial Future of Organisations • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduction in Funding to HEIs & |
| Drivers & the Case for Merger | Strategic Drivers for Merger | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creation of Critical Mass ○ Competitive Positioning ○ Ensuring Future Viability ○ Desire to 'Transform' |
| | University Designation as Driver for Merger | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fear of Being 'Left Behind' as an IoT and Dilution of IoT Brand ○ Mergers of 'Convenience' to create a TU ○ Specific Features of TUs ○ The 'Brand Value' of a University ○ TU as Recognition of Existing Academic Standing or Position • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Uncertainty around concept of a TU |

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| | Academic Case for Merger | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creation of Critical Mass and Access to Additional Resources ○ Enhanced Quality Assurance ○ Improved Educational Opportunities for the Community & Region ○ Further Opportunities for Research • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure to Clearly and Honestly Articulate an Academic Case for Merger |
| | Creation of Efficiencies & Rationalisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creation of Efficiencies & Economies of Scale ○ Financial Viability and Sustainability • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Funding of HE ○ Rationalisation & Consolidation Agenda ○ Reservations from Institutions towards Efficiency Agenda |
| | Regional Impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus on Serving Regional Needs and Agenda ○ Potential to Contribute to Regional Economic Growth • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure of HE Policy to Align with Approach Regional Development |
| | Alternatives to Merger | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inability to Explore Alternatives to Merger due to National Strategy • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure of Policy makers to 'Explain' or Justify the Merger Prerequisite ○ Failure of Policy Makers to Explore Alternatives to Merger |
| Making Key Strategic Choices | Selecting Partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Choosing a Likeminded Partner ○ The Fewer, the Better... ○ Choosing An 'Easy Target' • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy Limitations & Influence ○ Political Interference & Dictate ○ Reluctant Bedfellows ○ Earlier Configurations of Alliances |

| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Partners Withdrawing ○ Issues of Geographical Identity & Allegiance ○ Partners on Different Trajectories or at Different Stages of their Life Cycle ○ Trying to Avoid being 'Swallowed Up' |
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| | Name, Governance & Management Structure of New Institution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agreement on Organisational Structure ○ Agreement on the Name of the New Institution • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Challenges to Agreeing New Organisational Structure ○ Difficulty Agreeing on the Location of HQ of new Institution ○ Failure to Agree on Organisational Structure |
| | Vision & Mission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Importance of Creating and Communicating a High level Vision • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure to Agree and Commit to a Shared Vision |
| OPERATIONAL FACTORS | | |
| Subset | Grouping | Factor |
| Project Structures, Planning & Resources | Structures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Importance of Having an Adjudicator or Single Decision Making Body ○ Importance of Having One Project Office ○ Project Managers or Coordinators ○ Steering Group with Independent Chair ○ Implementation Groups ○ Working Groups or Areas |
| | Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Finding Alternative Funding Sources ○ Providing Additional Funding and Resources ○ Making Do with Existing Resources • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure of Govt. or HEA to Provide Necessary Financial Resources ○ Failure of Institutions to Commit the Necessary Human & Physical Resources ○ Failure to Cost the Project |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reluctance to Invest Resources due to Uncertainty with Process and Outcome ○ Underestimation of Work Required to Merge |
| | Project Planning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Benefits of having a Joint Budget ○ Agreeing an MOU ○ Engaging in Peer Reviews ○ Getting the Right Project Leaders in Place ○ Formal and Informal Process Operating in Parallel • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Difficulty Planning Timelines ○ HEA Criteria ○ HEA Process & Stages including International Panel Reviews ○ Inability or Reluctance of Groups to Make Decisions |
| | Due Diligence & Risk Assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Completing Due Diligence Early in the Process ○ Due Diligence as a Legal Requirement ○ Benefits of Completing Due Diligence ○ Key Areas in Due Diligence ○ Use of External Consultants to Complete Due Diligence • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Delaying Due Diligence ○ Failure to Agree on Due Diligence ○ Due Diligence and Distrust |
| | Building & Maintaining Momentum & Stability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Importance of Building and Maintaining Momentum ○ Importance of Moving Quickly ○ Importance of Stability ○ Need to Set and Adhere to Clear Dates and Timelines • Inhibitory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of or Losing Momentum ○ Stop Start Nature of the Process ○ Delay due to External Factors - e.g. Legislation, Funding, Inspections, Political Change etc. ○ Delay due to Internal Factors, e.g. IR issues, Changes in Personnel, Lack of Resources, 'Game Playing' |
| Communication & Support | Communicating with, Consulting & Engaging Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deploying Different Communication Strategies for Management vs Administrative vs Academic staff ○ Importance of Early Communication or Consultation ○ Use of Town Hall Meetings, Workshops, Meetings as methods of communicating |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhibitory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure to Consult or Communicate within Institution ○ Failure to get Wider Staff Involved or Engaged in the Process ○ Inability to Provide Clarity to Staff ○ Secrecy or Lack of Information |
| | Engagement with Stakeholders in the Wider Region | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need to Establish the Narrative with Stakeholders and 'Sell' the vision ○ Need to Manage Stakeholder Expectations ○ Stakeholder Engagement Process ○ Stakeholder Support ○ Improving Stakeholder Perceptions |
| | IR Issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need for Engagement and Honest Dialogue between Staff and Management ○ Some Trade Unions on Board • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Resistance from TUI ○ Academic Contract ○ Delay in Process which Allows Time for Opposition to Build Momentum ○ Fear of Staff due to Uncertainty |
| | Training & Support for Executive Team & Managers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provision of Training & Development around Change Management, Strategy & Mergers • Inhibitory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure to Invest in Management Development and Training ○ Pressure & Stress on Senior Management |
| | Lack of Govt/Dept/HEA Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEA, Dept. or Govt. Supportive of the Process • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure to Address Issues regarding Staff Contracts ○ Failure to Enact Necessary Legislation ○ Failure to Provide Funding Mechanisms ○ Failure to Prioritise Merger Project ○ Failure to Provide Advice Mechanisms to Institutions ○ Failure to Provide Clarity around Process & Criteria ○ 'Hands Off' Disinterested approach from HEA & Department ○ HEA Perceived as being more 'University' friendly ○ Inconsistency or Dishonesty of behaviour of HEA & Dept. ○ Interference by the HEA in its own Processes ○ Lack of Support or Funds to the HEA from Govt. |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of Alignment between HEA and Department & Government Objectives ○ The Need for a more Open Dialogue ○ Unclear Policy Drivers ○ Lack of Understanding by the HEA or Dept. |
| | Lack of Cooperation Across IoT Sector | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Willingness to Collaborate ○ Possible areas for Collaboration • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of National or Sectoral Coordination ○ Informal Collaboration ○ Failure to collaborate at senior levels of IoTs |
| Role of Key Actors | Role of Academic Council | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to Engage or Empower AC's <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of Coordination between AC's ○ Limited Role of AC in Process |
| | Role of Governing Body | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GB as Key Decision Making Body ○ Importance of Providing All Necessary Information & Briefings to GB ○ Importance of Strong Relationship between Chair and GB ○ Importance of Strong Relationship between Chair of GB and President ○ Joint GB Meetings or Sub Groups ○ Key Role of Chair of GB • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Difficulties Getting All GB's to Agree to the Same Thing at the Same Time ○ Failure of GB to 'Drive' the Process - 'Leaving it' to the Executive ○ Failure to hold Joint Meetings of or Generate Engagement between GB's ○ Perceived Lack of Independence & Instability of GB |
| | Role of External Consultants, Facilitators & Mediators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Change Catalysts for the Process ○ Need to be Credible, Respected, Experienced & Knowledgeable ○ Provide a Neutral & Independent Viewpoint ○ Provide Expertise & Knowledge not available within the Organisation ○ Provide Comfort and Confidence Internally ○ Provide Confidence & Credibility Externally ○ Act as Informal Mediators between Chairs & Presidents of Alliances ○ Act as Facilitators • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consultants being Appointed Externally by HEA or Govt. ○ Consultants being Perceived as being either 'Theirs' or 'Ours' ○ Consultants getting Frustrated or 'Biting their Tongues' |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ignoring the Advice of Consultants ○ Consultants being used to 'Do the Dirty Work' or as 'Scapegoats' |
| CULTURAL & HISTORIC FACTORS | | |
| Subset | Grouping | Factor |
| Cultural | Nature of Irish IoTs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 'Public Sector' Nature of IoTs ○ Lack of Hierarchical or Managerial Organisational Culture ○ Internally Political nature of IoTs ○ Historic Lack of Independence or Autonomy of IoTs ○ Collegiate Culture and Allegiance to Organisation |
| | Inflexibility of Boundary & Operating Conditions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inflexible Work Practices and Culture ○ Impact of Inflexibility of Staff Contracts |
| | Cultural Issues, Values & Identity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creating a New Culture • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cultural Differences between Academics and Administrators ○ Cultural Differences between Merging IoTs ○ Cultural Similarities between Merging IoTs ○ Failure to Investigate or Interrogate Cultural Issues ○ Geographical Identity and Culture ○ Differences in Culture due to Organisational Size ○ IoTs at different phases of their life cycle or on different trajectories ○ Risk Adverse Culture which Fears Change |
| | Regional Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Culture of 'Serving the Region' • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need to move beyond 'Regional' Considerations |
| | Academic Reputation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhibitory Factor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Differences in Academic Reputation or Prowess |

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| Historic | Historic Relationship between the Partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No History of Collaboration between Partners ○ History of a Competitive or Difficult Relationship between the Partners ○ Failure of Previous Collaboration |
| | Historic Positioning & Trajectory | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Similarities in Historical Development ○ Historical Trajectory and Orientation towards achieving University Designation • Inhibitory Factor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Historical Trajectory and Orientation towards achieving University Designation |
| | Lack of Cooperation Across IoT Sector | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Willingness to Collaborate ○ Possible areas for Collaboration ○ Informal Collaboration • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of National or Sectoral Coordination ○ Failure to collaborate at senior levels of IoTs |
| EMOTIVE FACTORS | | |
| Subset | Grouping | Factor |
| Personal | Commitment, Belief & Passion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Belief ○ Commitment from Very Senior Levels of the Organisation ○ Commitment to the Outcome rather than the Institution ○ Passion ○ Personal Commitment or Champions • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of Belief & Commitment |
| | Uncertainty, Insecurity, Fear & Frustration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Acceptance • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dishonesty or 'Game Playing' ○ Fear of Being 'Left Behind' in the Sector ○ Fear of or Apprehension about the Merger |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feeling Drained, Stressed, Pressured or Sapped of Energy ○ Frustration with the Process ○ Insecurity, Fear of Losing Identity or Autonomy ○ Lack of Control around Merger Process ○ Paranoia, Conspiracy, Rumour and Conjecture ○ Questioning if the Merger will ever happen ○ Uncertainty due to a Lack of Clarity around the Process ○ Uncertainty due to a Lack of Communication ○ Uncertainty due to Political Instability |
| Interpersonal | Respect, Equality & Parity of Esteem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Equality & Parity of Esteem ○ Mutual Respect • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Disrespect ○ Superiority or Arrogance |
| | Trust, Honesty & Understanding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Honesty & Openness ○ Importance of Building Strong Personal Relationships between Organisations ○ Sensitivity ○ Trust ○ Trust at Leadership Level ○ Initiatives to Build Trust ○ Re-building Trust ○ Understanding and Empathy |
| | Distrust, Suspicion, Hostility & Resentment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitatory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Acceptance that Some Degree of Suspicion 'is normal' • Inhibitory Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Antagonism ○ Dishonesty or 'Game Playing' ○ Distrust between Organisations ○ Distrust of Government or System Level Actors ○ Distrust within Organisation ○ Hostility ○ Paranoia, Conspiracy, Rumour and Conjecture ○ Resentment |

